

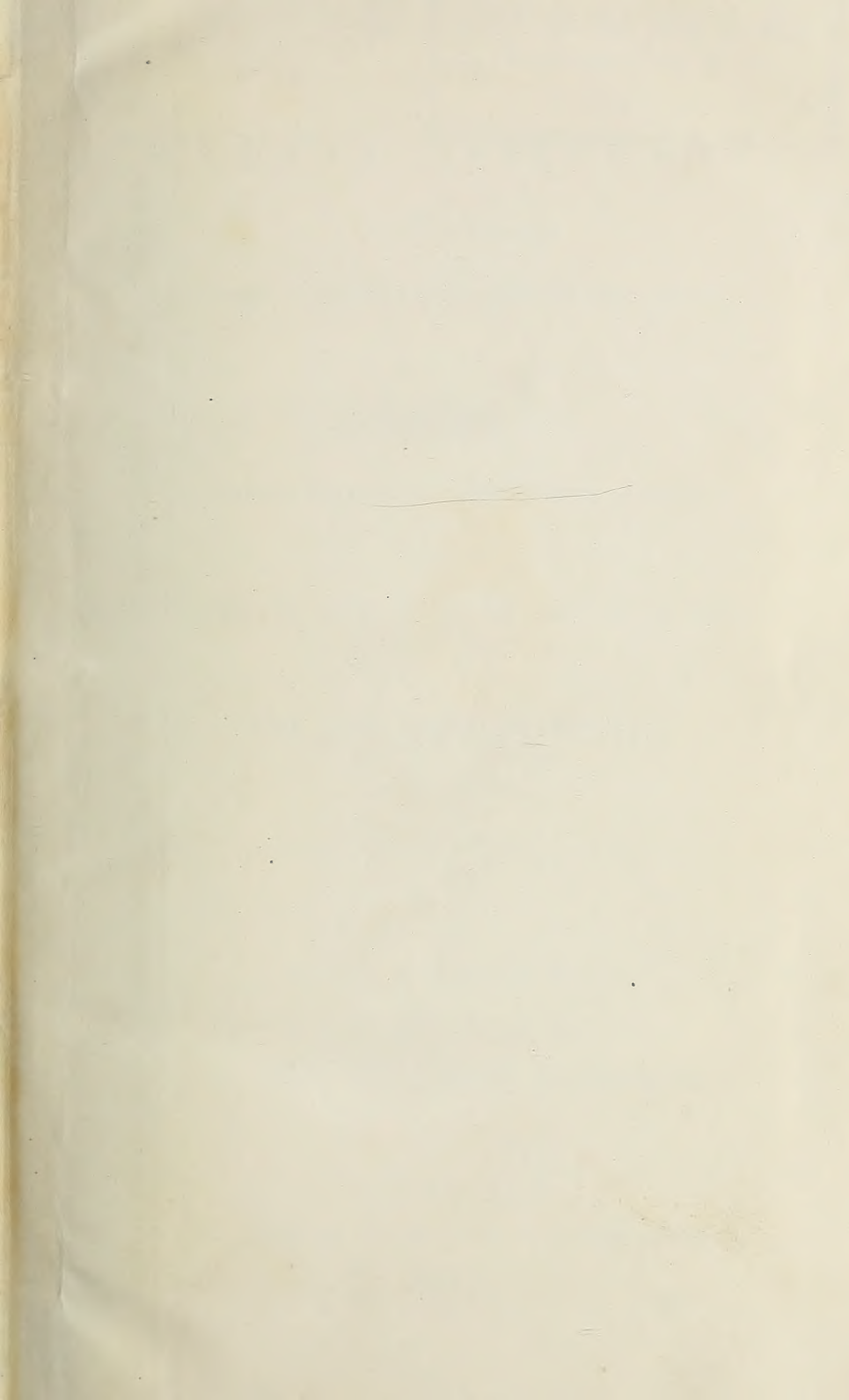


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JUDGE and MRS. ISAAC R. HITT,
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PULPIT ASSISTANT:

CONTAINING MORE THAN

THREE HUNDRED OUTLINES OR SKELETONS

OF

SERMONS,

CHIEFLY EXTRACTED FROM VARIOUS AUTHORS:

WITH

AN ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON,

BY

THE REV. THOMAS HANNAM.

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"APPLY THYSELF TO READING."—ST. PAUL.  
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From the Fifth London Edition,

REVISED, CORRECTED, AND ENLARGED,

BY THE REV. JAMES ANDERSON.

ROCHESTER:

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PREFACE

TO THE FOURTH LONDON EDITION.

“THE PULPIT ASSISTANT” was originally published by Mr. Hannam in two duodecimo volumes ; a second of four, and a third of five volumes were subsequently prepared by the present Editor, and issued from the press to supply the continued demand. The ready sale which these met with, and its having been out of print for some time, sufficiently indicate its acceptableness to the religious world, and justify the hope that a fourth edition will now be equally well received. With this expectation, the Work has been submitted to a very careful revision ; corrected and improved, particularly in the references, which the hasty publication of the last edition had left in a very imperfect state. Some new matter has likewise been added, and the whole condensed into one volume.

It is unnecessary to urge any thing more in favour of the utility of the Work, than its favourable reception by the Public. It has been the Editor's desire to bring together a mass of sound, scriptural divinity, illustrative of as great a variety of points of our holy religion, as is consistent with clearness ; and thus to facilitate the labours of students of divinity and young ministers, whose habits of composition are not matured ; and to assist others to whom time, or the opportunity of consulting writings of reference and authority, is wanting. To accomplish this design, abstracts have been made from the published discourses of divines of eminence, who have been most distinguished for correct and methodical arrangement, and combined with the outlines of original sermons. These it has been the Editor's endeavour to state simply, concisely, and distinctly ; and especially to illustrate by a copious textual authority.

That the whole may be acceptable to those for whom it is principally designed, and instrumental in the furtherance of the glorious Gospel of God our Saviour, Jesus Christ, is the humble but fervent wish of

“Their Companion in tribulation, in the

kingdom and patience of Jesus,”

JAMES ANDERSON.

5, OXFORD-STREET, LIVERPOOL,

January 31, 1831.

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EXTRACT FROM AN ESSAY

ON THE

COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

ON THE CHOICE OF TEXTS.

THERE are in general five parts of a sermon: the exordium, the connexion, the division, the discussion, and the application; but as connexion and division are parts which ought to be extremely short, we can properly reckon only three parts; exordium, discussion, and application. However, we will just take notice of connexion and division, after we have spoken a little on the choice of texts, and a few general rules of discussing them.

1. Never choose such texts as have not a complete sense; for only impertinent and foolish people will attempt to preach from one or two words, which signify nothing.

2. Not only words which have a complete sense of themselves must be taken, but they must also include the complete sense of the writer, whose words they are; for it is his language, and they are his sentiments which you explain. For example, should you take these words of 2 Cor. i. 3: "Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort," and stop here, you will include a complete sense; but it would not be the apostle's sense. Should you go farther, and add, "who comforteth us in all our tribulation," it would not then be the complete sense of St. Paul, nor would his meaning be wholly taken in, unless you went to the end of the fourth verse. When the complete sense of the sacred writer is taken, you may stop; for there are few texts in scripture, which do not afford matter sufficient for a sermon; and it is equally inconvenient to take too much text or too little; both extremes must be avoided.

General rules of sermons. 1. A sermon should clearly and purely explain a text, make the sense easily to be comprehended, and place things before the people's eyes, so that they may be understood without difficulty. This rule condemns embarrassment and obscurity, the most disagreeable thing in the world in a gospel pulpit. It ought to be re-

membered, that the greatest part of the hearers are simple people, whose profit, however, must be aimed at in preaching: but it is impossible to edify them, unless you be very clear. Bishop Burnett says, “a preacher is to fancy himself as in the room of the most unlearned man in the whole parish, and must therefore put such parts of his discourses as he would have all understand, in so plain a form of words, that it may not be beyond the meanest of them. This he will certainly study to do if his desire be to edify them, rather than to make them admire himself as a learned and high-spoken man.”

2. A sermon must give the entire sense of the whole text, in order to which it must be considered in every view. This rule condemns dry and barren explications, wherein the preacher discovers neither study nor invention, and leaves unsaid a great number of beautiful things with which his text would have furnished him. In matters of religion and piety, not to edify much is to destroy much; and a sermon cold and poor, will do more mischief in an hour, than a hundred rich sermons can do good.

3. The preacher must be wise, in opposition to those impertinent people who utter jests, comical comparisons, quirks, and extravagances; sober, in opposition to those rash spirits who would penetrate all, and curiously dive into mysteries beyond the bounds of modesty; chaste, in opposition to those bold and imprudent geniuses who are not ashamed of saying many things which produce unclean ideas in the mind.

4. A preacher must be simple and grave. Simple, speaking things of good natural sense, without metaphysical speculations; grave, because all sorts of vulgar and proverbial sayings ought to be avoided. The pulpit is the seat of good natural sense, and the good sense of good men.

5. The understanding must be informed, but in a manner, however, which affects the heart; either to comfort the hearers, or to excite them to acts of piety, repentance, or holiness.

6. One of the most important precepts for the discussion of a text, and the composition of a sermon, is, above all things, to avoid excess:—

1. There must not be too much genius. I mean, not too many brilliant, sparkling, and striking things; for they would produce very bad effects. The auditor will never fail to say, “The man preaches himself, aims to display his genius, and is not animated by the Spirit of God, but by that of the world.”

2. A sermon must not be overcharged with doctrine, because the hearers’ memories cannot retain it all; and by aiming to keep all, they will lose all. Take care, then, not to charge your sermon with too much matter.

3. Care must also be taken never to strain any particular part, either in attempting to exhaust it, or to penetrate too far into it. Frequently in attempting it, you will distil the subject till it evaporates.

4. Figures must not be overstrained. This is done by stretching metaphor into allegory, or by carrying a parallel too far. A metaphor is

changed into an allegory, when a number of things are heaped up, which agree to the subject in keeping close to the metaphor. Allegories may sometimes be used very agreeably: but they must not be strained; that is, all that can be said on them must not be said.

5. Reasoning must not be carried too far. This may be done many ways; either by long trains of reasons, composed of a number of propositions chained together, or principles and consequences, which way of reasoning is embarrassing and painful to the auditor. The mind of man loves to be conducted in a more smooth and easy way.

Of Connexion.—The connexion is the relation of your text to the foregoing or following verses. To find this, consider the scope of the discourse, and consult commentators; particularly exercise your own good sense.

When the coherence will furnish any agreeable considerations for the illustration of the text, they must be put in the discussion; and they will very often happen. Sometimes, also, you may draw thence an exordium: in such a case, the exordium and connexion will be confounded together.

Of Division.—Division, in general, ought to be restrained to a small number of parts; they should never exceed four or five at the most: the most admired sermons have only two or three parts.

There are two sorts of divisions, which we may very properly make: the first, which is the most common, is the division of the text into its parts: the other is of the discourse, or sermon itself, which is made on the text.

1. This method is proper when a prophecy of the Old Testament is handled; for, generally, the understanding of these prophecies depends on many general considerations, which, by exposing and refuting false senses, open a way to the true explication.

2. This method is also proper on a text taken from a dispute, the understanding of which must depend on the state of the question, the hypothesis of adversaries, and the principles of the inspired writers. All these lights are previously necessary, and they can only be given by general considerations; for example, Rom. iii. 28. "We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Some general considerations must precede, which clear up the state of the question between St. Paul and the Jews touching justification, which mark the hypothesis of the Jews upon that subject, and which discover the true principle which St. Paul would establish; so that in the end the text may be clearly understood.

3. This method also is proper in a conclusion drawn from a long preceding discourse; as for example, Rom. v. 1: "Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." The discourse must be divided into two parts; the first consisting of some general considerations on the doctrine of justification, which St. Paul establishes in the preceding chapters; and the second, of his conclusion, that, being thus justified, we have peace with God, &c.

The same may be said of the first verse of the eighth of Romans : " There is, therefore, now no condemnation," &c. for it is a consequence drawn from what he had been establishing before.

4. The same method is proper for texts which are quoted in the New Testament from the Old. You must prove by general considerations that the text is properly produced, and then you may come clearly to its explication. Of this kind are Heb. i. 5, 6 : " I will be to him a Father," &c. " One, in a certain place, testified," &c. ii. 6. " Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith," &c. iii. 7. There are many passages of this kind in the New Testament.

5. In this class must be placed divisions into different regards, or different views. These, to speak properly, are not divisions of a text into its parts, but rather different applications, which are made of the same texts to divers subjects. Typical texts should be divided thus ; and a great number of passages in the Psalms, which relate not only to David, but also to Jesus Christ : such should be considered first literally, as they relate to David ; and then in the mystical sense, as they refer to the Lord Jesus.

There are also typical passages, which, beside their literal senses, have also figurative meanings, relating not only to Jesus Christ, but also to the church in general, and to every believer in particular.

For example, Dan. ix. 7 : " O Lord, righteousness belongeth to thee, but unto us, confusion of face as at this day ;" must not be divided into parts, but considered in different views : 1. In regard to all men in general. 2. In regard to the Jewish church in Daniel's time. 3. In regard to ourselves at this present day.

So again, Heb. iii. 7, 8 : " To-day, if ye will hear his voice," which is taken from Psalm xcv. cannot be better divided than by referring it—1. To David's time. 2. St. Paul's. And, lastly, To our own.

As to the division of the text itself, sometimes the order of the words is so clear and natural, that no division is necessary ; you need only follow simply the order of the words. As for example, Eph. i. 3 : " Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." It is not necessary to divide this text, because the words divide themselves, and to explain them we need only follow them. Here is a grateful acknowledgment, " Blessed be God." The title under which the apostle blesses God, " the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The reason for which he blesses him, because " he hath blessed us." The plenitude of this blessing, " with all blessings." The nature or kind, signified by the term " spiritual." The place where he hath blessed us, " in heavenly places." In whom he hath blessed us, " in Christ."

Most texts, however, ought to be formally divided ; for which purpose you must principally have regard to the order of nature, and put that division, which naturally precedes, in the first place, and the rest must follow, each in its proper order.

There are two natural orders : one natural in regard to subjects themselves ; the other natural in regard to us.

And though, in general, you may follow which of the two others you please, yet there are some texts that determine the division ; as Phil. ii. 13. "It is God who worketh effectually in you, both to will, and to do, of his own good pleasure." There are, it is plain, three things to be discussed ; the action of God's grace upon men, "God worketh effectually in you ;" the effect of this grace, "to will, and to do ;" and the spring or source of the action, according to "his good pleasure." I think the division would not be proper if we were to treat : 1. Of God's good pleasure ; 2. Of his grace ; and 3. Of the will and works of men.

Above all things, in divisions, take care of putting any thing in the first part which supposes the understanding of the second, or which obliges you to treat of the second to make the first understood ; for by these means you will throw yourself into a great confusion, and be obliged to make many tedious repetitions. You must endeavour to disengage the one from the other as well as you can ; and when your parts are too closely connected with each other, place the most detached first, and endeavour to make that serve for a foundation to the explication of the second, and the second to the third ; so that, at the end of your explication, the hearer may with a glance perceive, as it were, a perfect body, a well finished building : for one of the greatest excellences of a sermon is, the harmony of its component parts ; that the first leads to the second, the second serves to introduce the third ; that they which go before excite a desire for those which are to follow.

When in a text there are several terms which need a particular explanation, and which cannot be explained without confusion, or without dividing the text into too many parts, then I would not divide the text at all ; but I would divide the discourse into two or three parts ; and I would propose first, to explain the terms, and then the subject itself.

There are many texts, in discussing which it is not necessary to treat of either subject or attribute ; but all the discussion depends on the terms, *syncategorematica*, (words, which of themselves signify nothing, but in conjunction with others are very significative.) For example, John iii. 16: "God so loved the world," &c. The categorical proposition is, God loved the world ; yet it is neither necessary to insist much on the term God, nor to speak in a common-place way of the love of God ; but divide the text into two parts : first, the gift which God in his love hath made of his Son ; secondly, the end for which he gave him, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

There are texts of reasoning, which are composed of an objection and an answer, and the division of such is plain ; for they naturally divide into the objection and solution. As Rom. vi. 1, 2 : "What shall we say then," &c.

There are some texts of reasoning which are extremely difficult to divide, because they cannot be reduced into many propositions without confusion. As, John iv. 10 : "if thou knewest the gift of God," &c.

I think it might not be improper to divide it into two parts, the first including the general propositions contained in the words : and the second, the particular application of these to the Samaritan woman.

There are sometimes texts which imply many important truths without expressing them ; and yet it will be necessary to mention and enlarge upon them, either because they are useful on some important occasion, or because they are important of themselves. Then the text may be divided into two parts ; one implied, and the other expressed.

In texts of history, divisions are easy ; sometimes an action is related in all its circumstances, and then you may consider the action in itself first, and afterward the circumstances of the action.

To render a division agreeable, and easy to be remembered by the hearer, endeavour to reduce it as often as possible to simple terms.

As to subdivisions, it is always necessary to make them ; for they very much assist composition, and diffuse perspicuity into a discourse ; but it is not always needful to mention them ; on the contrary, they must be very seldom mentioned, because it would load the hearer's mind with a multitude of particulars.

Discussion.—There are four methods of discussion. Clear subjects must be discussed by observation, or continued application ; difficult and important ones by explication or proposition.

I. *By Explication.*—The difficulty is in regard to the terms ; to the subject ; or to both.

1. *Explication of Terms.*—The difficulties of these arise from three causes ; either the terms do not seem to make any sense, or they are equivocal, forming different senses ; or the sense they seem to make at first appears perplexed, improper, or contradictory ; or the meaning, though clear, may be controverted, and is exposed to cavil. First, propose the *ratio dubitandi*, which makes the difficulty ; then determine it as briefly as you can.

2. *Of Things.*—Difficult things. If the difficulty arise from errors, or false senses, refute and remove them ; then establish the truth. If from the intricacy of the subject itself, do not propose difficulties and raise objections ; but enter immediately into the explication of the matter, and take care to arrange your ideas well.

3. Important things, though clear, must be discussed by explication, because they are important.

There are two sorts of explications : the one simple and plain, needs only to be proposed and agreeably elucidated ; the other must be confirmed, if it speak of fact, by proofs of fact ; if of right, by proofs of right ; if of both proofs, of both. A great and important subject, consisting of many branches, may be reduced to a certain number of propositions or questions, and discussed one after the other.

N. B. Sometimes what you will have to explain in a text will consist of one or more simple terms ; of ways of speaking peculiar to scripture ; of particles called *syncategorematica* ; and sometimes of different propositions.

1. Simple terms are, the Divine attributes, goodness, &c. man's virtues or vices, faith, hope, &c. Simple terms are either proper or figurative: if figurative, give the meaning of the figure; and without stopping long, pass on to the thing itself. Some simple terms must only be explained just as they relate to the intention of the sacred Author: in a word, explain simple terms, as much as possible, in relation to the present design of the sacred Author. Sometimes the simple terms in a text must be discussed professedly, in order to give a clear and full view of the subject. Sometimes, when there are many, it might be injudicious to treat of them separately, but beautifully to do it by comparison.

2. Expressions peculiar to scripture deserve a particular explanation, because they are rich in meaning. Such as, To be *in* Christ; come *after* Christ, &c.

3. Particles called *syncategorematica*, (such as none, some, all, now, when, &c.) which augment or limit the meaning of the proposition, should be carefully examined; for often the whole explication depends upon them.

4. When the matter to be explained in a text consists of a proposition, give the sense clearly; if necessary, show its importance; if it require confirmation, confirm it.

In all cases, illustrate by reasons, examples, comparisons of the subject; their relations, conformities, or differences. You may do it by consequences: by the person, his state, &c. who proposes the subject; or the persons to whom it is proposed; by circumstance, time, place, &c. You may illustrate a proposition by its evidence or inevidence. It is discoverable by the light of nature, or only by revelation. Let good sense choose the best topics.

Sometimes a proposition includes many truths which must be distinguished; sometimes a proposition must be discussed in different views; sometimes it has different degrees, which must be remarked; sometimes it is general, and of little importance, then examine whether some of its parts be not more considerable; if so, they must be discussed by a particular application.

II. *By Observation*; which is best for clear and historical passages. Some texts require both explication and observation. Sometimes an observation may be made by way of explication. Observations, for the most part, ought to be theological; historical, philosophical, or critical, very seldom. They must not be proposed in a scholastic style, nor common-place form: but in a free, easy, familiar manner.

III. *By continual Application*.—This may be done without explaining or making observations. In this manner we must principally manage texts exhorting to holiness and repentance. In using this method, something searching and powerful must be said, or better it should be let alone.

IV. *By Proposition*.—The texts must be reduced to two propositions at least, and three or four at most, having a mutual dependence and connexion. This method opens the most extensive field for discussion. In the former methods you are restrained to your text; but here your subject is the matter contained in your propositions.

The way of explication is most proper to give the meaning of scripture : this of systematical divinity : and it has this advantage, it will equally serve either theory or practice.

N. B. Though these four ways are different from each other, for many texts it may be necessary to use two or three, and for some all the four ; the discourse has its name from the prevailing method in handling it.

The conclusion. This ought to be lively and animating, full of great and beautiful figures, aiming to move Christian affections. As the love of God, hope, zeal, repentance, self-condemnation, a desire of self-correction, consolation, admiration of eternal benefits, hope of felicity, courage and constancy in afflictions, steadiness in temptations, gratitude to God, recourse to him by prayer ; and other such dispositions.

There are three sorts of dispositions ; the violent, tender, and elevated. To raise these, the conclusion should be violent, tender, or elevated.

It may be sometimes mixed : it must always be diversified.

N. B. Let the peroration, or conclusion, be short ; let it be bold and lively. Let some one or more striking idea, not mentioned in the discussion, be reserved for this part, and applied with vigour.

THE PULPIT ASSISTANT.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.—Ps. xiv. 1.

“THE fool hath said”—it is evident that none but a fool would have said it. The fool, a term in scripture, signifying a wicked man; one who hath lost his wisdom, and right apprehension of God; one dead in sin, yet one not so much void of rational faculties, as of grace in those faculties; not one that wants reason, but one who abuses his reason.

“Said in his heart;” *i. e.* he thinks, or he doubts, or he wishes. Thoughts are words in heaven. He dares not openly publish it, though he dares secretly think it: he doubts, he wishes, and sometimes hopes.

“There is no God,” no judge, no one to govern, reward, or punish. Those who deny the providence of God, do in effect deny his existence; they strip him of that wisdom, goodness, mercy, and justice, which are the glory of the Deity. Men, who desire liberty to commit works of darkness, would not only have the lights in the house dimmed, but extinguished. What men say against Providence, because they would have no check, they would say in their hearts against the very existence of God, because they would have no judge.

The existence of God is the foundation of all religion. The whole building totters, if the foundation be out of course. We must believe that he is, and that he is what he hath declared himself, before we can seek him, adore him, love him.

It is, therefore, necessary we should know why we believe, that our belief be founded on undeniable evidence, and that we may give a better reason for his existence than that we have heard our parents and teachers tell us so. It is as much as to say, “There is no God,” when we have no better arguments than those.

That we may be fully persuaded of, and established in this truth, endeavour,

I. To bring forward a few observations in the defence thereof.

1. All nature shows the existence of its maker. We cannot open our eyes, but we discover this truth shine through all creatures. The whole universe bears the character and stamp of a First Cause, infinitely wise, infinitely powerful. Let us cast our eyes on the earth that bears us, and ask, “Who laid the foundation?” Job xxxviii. 4. Let us look on that vast arch of the skies that covers us, and inquire, “Who hath thus stretched it forth?” Isa. xl. 21, 22. Who is it also, that has fixed so many great luminous bodies, with so much order and regularity? Job xxi. 13. The various works of creation proclaim to

as "his eternal power and godhead." Rom. i. 20. Acts xiv. 16, 17; xvii. 26. Every plant, every atom, as well as every star, bears witness of a Deity. Who ever saw statues, or pictures, but concluded there has been a statuary and limner? Who can behold garments, ships, or houses, and not understand there was a weaver, a carpenter, an architect? All things that are demonstrate something from whence they are. A man may as well doubt whether there be a sun, when he sees his beams gilding the earth, as doubt whether there be a God, when he sees his works. Ps. xix. 1—6.

The atheist is, therefore, a fool, because he denies that which every creature in his constitution asserts: can he behold the spiders' nets, or silk-worms' web, the bees' closets, or the ants' granaries, without acknowledging a higher being than a creature, who hath planted that genius in them? Job xxxix. Ps. civ. 24. "The stars fought against Sisera." Judges v. 20. All the stars in heaven and the dust on earth oppose the atheist. Rom. i. 19, 20.

2. The *dread of conscience* is an argument to convince us of this truth. "Every one that finds me shall slay me," Gen. iv. 14, was the language of Cain: and the like apprehensions are not seldom in those who feel the fury of an enraged conscience. The Psalmist tells us, concerning those who say in their heart, "There is no God," that "they are in fear where no fear is." Ps. liii. 5. Their guilty minds invent terrors, and thereby confess a Deity, whilst they deny it—that there is a sovereign Being who will punish. Pashur, who wickedly insulted the prophet Jeremiah, had this for his reward, that "his name should be Magor Missabib," *i. e.* "fear round about." Jer. xx. 3, 4. When Belshazzar saw the handwriting, "his countenance was changed." Dan. v. 6. The apostle, who tells us that there is a "law written in the hearts of men," adds, their "consciences also bear witness." Rom. ii. 15. The natural sting and horror of conscience are a demonstration that there is a God to judge and punish.

The atheist is a fool, because he useth violence to his conscience. The operations of conscience are universal. The iron bars upon Pharaoh's conscience at last gave way. Ex. ix. 27.

3. *Universal consent* is another argument. The notion of a God is found among all nations; it is the language of every country and region: the most abominable idolatry argues a Deity. All nations, though ever so barbarous and profligate, have confessed some god. This universal verdict of mankind is no other than the voice of God, the testimony of reason, and the language of nature; there is no speech, nor tongue, where this voice is not heard.

Is it not, therefore, folly for any man to deny that which nature has engraven on the minds of all?

4. *Extraordinary judgments.* When a just revenge follows abominable crimes, especially when the judgment is suited to the sin; when the sin is made legible by the inflicted judgment. "The Lord is known by the judgments which he executes." Ps. ix. 16. Herod Agrippa received the flattering applause of the people, and thought himself a god; but was, by the judgment inflicted on him, forced to confess another. Acts xii. 21—23. Judges i. 6, 7. Acts v. 1—10.

5. *Accomplishments of prophecies.* To foretell things that are future, as if they did already exist, or had existed long ago, must be the result of a mind infinitely intelligent. "Show the things that are to come hereafter." Isa. xli. 23. "I am God, declaring the end from the beginning." Isa. xlv. 10. Cyrus was prophesied of, Isa. xlv. 28, and xlv. 1, long before he was born; Alexander's sight of Daniel's prophecy concerning his victories moved him to spare Jerusalem. The four monarchies are plainly deciphered in Daniel, before the fourth rose up. That power, which foretells things beyond the wit of man, and orders all causes to bring about those predictions, must be an infinite power: the same as made, sustains and governs all things according to his pleasure, and to bring about his own ends; and this being is God. "I am the Lord, and there is none else." Isa. xlv. 6, 7.

What folly, then, for any to shut their eyes, and stop their ears; to attribute those things to blind chance which nothing less than an infinitely wise and infinitely powerful Being could effect!

II. A few observations.

1. If God can be seen in creation, study the creatures; the creatures are the heralds of God's glory. "The glory of the Lord shall endure." Ps. civ. 31. The world is a sacred temple; man is introduced to contemplate it. As *grace* doth not destroy nature, so the book of redemption does not blot out the book of creation. Read nature; nature is a friend to truth.

2. If it be a folly to deny or doubt the being of God, is it not a folly also not to worship God, when we acknowledge his existence? "To fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man." We are not reasonable, if we are not religious. "Your reasonable service." Rom. xii. 1.

3. If it be a folly to deny the existence of God, will it not be our wisdom, since we acknowledge his being, often to think of him? It is the black mark of a fool, "God is not in all his thoughts." Ps. x. 4.

4. If we believe the being of God, let us abhor practical atheism. Actions speak louder than words. "They professed that they knew God." Tit. i. 16. Men's practices are the best indexes to their principles. "Let your light shine before men." Mat. v. 16.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world: even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.—Ps. xc. 2.

THE title of this psalm is a prayer, the author Moses. There are two parts in this psalm; a complaint of the frailty of man's life in general, verses 3—6; and then a particular complaint of the condition of the church, verses 8—10; a prayer, verse 12. But, before he speaks of the shortness of human life, he fortifies them by the consideration of the refuge they had, and should find in God, verse 1: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place." God is a perpetual refuge, and security to

his people. His providence is not confined to one generation; it is not one age only that tastes his bounty and compassion. His providence is not wearied, nor his care fainting; he never wanted will to relieve us, for he hath been our refuge; nor ever can want power to support us, for he is a God from everlasting to everlasting. The church never wanted a pilot to steer her, and a rock to shelter her, and dash in pieces the waves which threaten her. How worthy is it to remember former benefits, when we come to beg for new. Never were the records of God's mercies so exactly revised, as when his people have stood in need of new editions of his power; and though so much strength hath been upon various occasions manifested, yet his arm is not weakened; for, "from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." God is of an eternal duration. The eternity of God is the foundation of the stability of the covenant, the great comfort of a Christian.

I. How God is eternal, or in what respect he is so.

Eternity is a negative attribute, and is a denying of God any measure of time, as immensity is a denying of him any bounds of place: as immensity is the diffusion of his essence, so eternity is the duration of his essence.

1. God is without beginning. "In the beginning God created the world:" God was then before the beginning of it; and what point can be set wherein God began, if he were before the beginning of created things! God was without beginning, though all other things had time and beginning from him. Gen. i. 1. Whatsoever number of millions of millions of years we can imagine before the creation of the world, yet God was infinitely before these; he is therefore called the Ancient of Days. Dan. vii. 9.

2. God is without end. He always was, always is, and always will be what he is; he remains always the same in being; so far from any change, that no shadow of it can touch him. James i. 17. "The Lord shall endure for ever." As it is impossible he should not be, being from all eternity; so it is impossible that he should not be to all eternity. He is said to live forever. "The earth shall perish, but God shall endure for ever, and his years shall have no end." Ps. cii. 27. That which had no beginning of duration can never have an end, nor any interruptions in it. Since God never depended upon any, what should make him cease to be what eternally he hath been, or put a stop to the continuance of his perfections?

3. There is no succession in God? God is without succession, or change; it is a part of eternity. "From everlasting to everlasting, he is God," *i. e.* the same. God doth not only always remain in being, but he always remains the same in that being. "Thou art the same." The creatures are in a perpetual flux; something is acquired, or something lost, every day. A man is the same in regard of existence, when he is a man, as he was when he was a child, but there is a new succession of quantities and qualities in him. Of a creature it may be said, he was, or he is, or he shall be; of God it cannot be said, but only he is; he is what he always was, and he is what he always will be.

There is no succession in the knowledge of God. The variety of successions and changes in the world make no succession or new

objects in the Divine Mind; for all things are present to him from eternity. "Known unto God are all things from the beginning." Acts xv. 18.

There is no succession in the decrees of God. He doth not decree this now, which he decreed not before. "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy." Eph. i. 4.

4. God is his own eternity. He is not eternal by grant, and the disposal of any other, but by nature and essence. The eternity of God is nothing else but the duration of God; and the duration of God is nothing else but his existence enduring.

5. Hence all the perfections of God are eternal. In regard of the Divine eternity, all things in God are eternal; his power, mercy, wisdom, justice, knowledge.

II. God is eternal, and must needs be so.

The Spirit of God, in scripture, condescends to our capacities, in signifying the eternity of God by days and years; but we must not conceive that God is bounded, or measured by time. Ps. cii. 27. Though years are ascribed to him, yet they are such as cannot be numbered. "The number of his years cannot be searched out." Job xxxvi. 26, 27. Sometimes this eternity is expressed by parts, as looking backward and forward; by the difference of time, past, present, and to come; "which was, and is, and is to come." Rev. i. 8; and iv. 8. He always was, is now, and always will be.

1. His eternity is evident, by the name God gives himself. "And God said unto Moses, I am that I am; I am hath sent me unto you." Ex. iii. 14. God only can be called "I am;" all creatures have more of not being than being. If God, therefore, be properly "I am," *i. e.* being, it follows that he always was.

2. God hath life in himself. "The Father hath life in himself." John v. 26. He is the living God, therefore stedfast for ever. Dan. vi. 26. He hath life by his essence, not by participation: he is a sun, to give light and life to all creatures, but receives not light nor life from any thing; and therefore he hath an unlimited life: not a drop of life, but a fountain; not a spark of a limited life, but a life transcending all bounds; he hath life in himself: all creatures have their life in him, and from him. Since he hath life in himself, and there was no cause of his existence, he can have no cause of his limitation, and can no more be determined to a time, than he can to place. What hath life in itself hath life without bounds, and can never desert it, nor be deprived of it: so that he lives necessarily; all other things "live, and move, and have their being in him." Acts xvii. 28.

3. If God were not eternal, he were not immutable in his nature. It is contrary to the nature of immutability to be without eternity; for whatsoever begins, is changed in its passing from not being to being. "I am the Lord, I change not." Mal. iii. 6. "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out." Job xxxvii. 23. God is a sun, glittering always in the same glory.

4. God could not be an infinitely perfect being, if he were not eternal. A finite duration is inconsistent with infinite perfection. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Job xi. 7. He cannot be found out;

he is infinite, because he is incomprehensible. "He is blessed from everlasting to everlasting." Ps. xli. 13. Had he a beginning, he could not have all perfection without limitation; he would have been limited by that which gave him beginning.

5. God could not be omnipotent, almighty, if he were not eternal. The title of Almighty agrees not with a nature that had a beginning; whosoever hath a beginning, was once nothing; and when it was nothing, could act nothing. The almightiness and eternity of God are linked together: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending, which was, and which is, and which is to come, the Almighty." Rev. i. 8.

6. God would not be the first cause of all, if he were not eternal. But he is the first and the last; the first cause of all things, the last end of all things. Rev. i. 8. This power cannot but be eternal; it must be before the world; the founder must be before the foundation; and his existence must be from eternity, or we must say nothing did exist from eternity. Nothing hath no faculties: so that it is necessary to grant some eternal being, or run into inextricable labyrinths and mazes. So then, if God were the cause of all things, he did exist before all things, and that from eternity.

III. Eternity is only proper to God, and not communicable.

It is as great a madness to ascribe eternity to the creature, as to deprive the Lord of the creature of eternity. It is so proper to God, that when the apostle would prove the deity of Christ, he proves it by his immutability and eternity, as well as his creating power: "Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." Heb. i. 10—12. Angels and souls have an immortality, but by donation from God, not by their own essence; dependent upon their Creator, not necessary in their own nature. Whatsoever is not God, is temporary; whatsoever is eternal, is God.

It is a contradiction to say a creature can be eternal; as nothing eternal is created, so nothing created is eternal. Eternity being the essence of God, it would be all one to admit many gods, as many eternals.

1. Creation is a producing something from nothing. What was once nothing, cannot therefore be eternal.

2. There is no creature but is mutable, therefore not eternal. It is as much the essence of a creature to be mutable, as it is the essence of God to be immutable.

3. No creature is infinite, therefore not eternal. To be infinite in duration is all one as to be infinite in essence. This is the property of the Deity.

4. No effect of an intellectual free agent can be equal in duration to its cause. The producers of natural agents are as ancient often as themselves; the sun produceth a beam as old in time as itself; but whoever heard of a piece of wise workmanship as old as the wise artificer? God only is eternal, the first and the last, the beginning and the end; who, as he subsisted before any creature had a being, so he will eternally subsist, if all creatures were reduced to nothing.

IV. Use.

I. Of information.

1. If God be of an eternal duration, then Christ is God. Eternity is the property of God, but it is ascribed to Christ. "He is before all things," *i. e.* all created things. "All things were created by him," Col. i. 16. He hath no difference of time; "for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Micah v. 2. "Whose goings forth have been from of old." As the eternity of God is the ground of religion, so the eternity of Christ is the ground of the Christian religion.

2. If God be eternal, he knows all things as present. All things are present to him in his eternity; for this is the notion of eternity; to be without succession. "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning." Acts xv. 18.

3. How bold and foolish is it for a mortal creature to censure the counsels and actions of an eternal God, or be too curious in his inquiries? "Who hath enjoined him his way?" Job xxxvi. 23.

4. What a folly and boldness is there in sin, since an eternal God is offended thereby? All sin is aggravated by God's eternity. The blackness of the heathen idolatry was in changing the glory of the incorruptible God. Rom. i. 23.

5. How dreadful is it to lie under the stroke of an eternal God. His eternity is a great terror to him that hates him, as it is a comfort to him that loves him; because he is the living God, and everlasting king, "The nations shall not be able to abide his indignation." Jer. x. 10. He will "whet his glittering sword," and his "hand shall take hold of judgment," and he will "render vengeance to his enemies, and a reward to them that hate him;" Deut. xxxii. 41, 42; a reward proportioned to the greatness of their offences, and the glory of an eternal God. "I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live forever;" *i. e.* as surely as I live for ever, I will whet my glittering sword.

II. Of comfort.—What foundation of comfort can we have in any of God's attributes, were it not for his infiniteness and eternity; though he be merciful, good, wise, faithful? What support could there be, if they were perfections belonging to a corruptible God?

1. If God be eternal, his covenant will be so. It is founded upon the eternity of God: the oath whereby he confirms it, is by his life: since there is none greater than himself, he swears by himself.

2. If God be eternal, he being our God in covenant, is an eternal good and possession. "This God is our God for ever and ever; he is a dwelling-place in all generations." Ps. xc. 1. We shall traverse the world awhile, and then arrive at the blessings Jacob wished for Joseph, the blessings of the everlasting hills.

3. The enjoyment of God will be as fresh and glorious after many ages, as it was at first. God is eternal, and eternity knows no change.

4. If God be eternal: here is a strong ground of comfort against all the distresses of the church, and the threats of the church's enemies. God's abiding for ever, is the plea Jeremiah makes for his return to his forsaken church. The first discovery of the name "I am," which signifies the Divine eternity as well as immutability, was for the comfort of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt. Ex. iii. 14, 15. The church's enemies are not to be feared; they may spring as the grass, but soon after do wither by their own inward principles of decay, or are cut down by

the hand of God. Ps. xcii. 7—9. They may threaten, but their breath may vanish as soon as their threatenings are pronounced. Do the prophets and instructors of the church live for ever? No. Shall then the adversaries and disturbers of the church live for ever? They shall vanish as a shadow. He that inhabits eternity, is above them that inhabit mortality, who must, whether they will or no, say to corruption, "Thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother, and my sister."

5. Hence follows another comfort: since God is eternal, he hath as much power as will to be as good as his word. Trust in the Lord for ever.

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?—Ps. cxxxix. 7.

GOD is here; God is every where; veils of flesh and blood prevent our sight of him; these must fall, and we must open the eyes of our spirits, if we would see a God who is a spirit. Hear our prophet, hear his magnificent description of the immensity and omnipresence of God: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there," 7—12.

In a text less abundant in riches, we might make some remarks on the term spirit and presence; but we shall content ourselves at present with indicating what ideas we affix to them, by observing, that by the spirit and presence of God, we understand God himself. The other expressions in our text, heaven, hell, the wings of the morning, are figurative expressions, denoting the rapidity of the light in communicating itself from one end of the world to the other; these expressions need no comment. The presence of God, the Spirit of God, signify then the Divine essence: and this assemblage of ideas, "whither shall I go from thy Spirit? whither shall I flee from thy presence?" means, that God is immense, and that he is present in every place. But wherein consists this immensity and omnipresence? We will content ourselves with giving you some light into the omnipresence of God.

I. By removing those false ideas, which, at first, seem to present themselves to the imagination.

II. By assigning the true.

I. Let us remove the false ideas.

When we say that God is present in any place, let none suppose we mean, that he is actually contained therein; as if, when we say that God is in every place, we mean to assign to him a real and proper extension. Neither of these is designed.

1. "God is a spirit." John iv. 24. A spirit cannot be in a place, at least, in the manner in which we conceive of place.

But perhaps God, who is spiritual in one part of his essence, may be corporeal in another. No; for however admirable in man that union may be, and those laws which unite his soul to his body, nothing more fully marks his weakness and dependence, and consequently nothing

can less agree with the Divine essence. If God be sometimes represented with feet, with hands, with eyes, these portraits are designed rather to give us emblems of his attributes, than images, properly speaking, of any parts which he possesseth. But there is a very just sense in which it may be said, that the whole universe is the body of the Deity. In effect, as we call this portion of matter our body, which we move, act, and direct, as we please, so God actuates by his will every part of the universe. "He weighs the mountains in scales." Isa. xl. 12.

2. But to prove that "God is a Spirit," and that he occupies no place, at least as our imagination conceives, is, in our opinion, to establish the same thesis.

It is difficult to make this consequence intelligible and clear. Yet, I think, whatever difficulty there may be in this system, there is a greater difficulty in the opposite opinion.

II. What notions then must we form of the immensity of God? In what sense do we conceive that the Infinite Spirit is every where present?

The bounds of our knowledge are so strait, our sphere is so contracted, we have such imperfect ideas of spirits, even of our own spirits, and for a much stronger reason of the "Father of spirits," Heb. xii. 9, that no genius in the world, however exalted you may suppose him, after his greatest efforts of meditation, can say to you, "Thus far extend the attributes of God; behold a complete idea of his immensity and omnipresence." Yet, by the help of sound reason, above all, by the aid of revelation, we may give you, if not complete, at least distinct ideas of the subject. The omnipresence of God is that universal property by which he communicates himself to all, diffuses himself through all, is the great director of all, or, to confine ourselves to more distinct ideas still, the Infinite Spirit is present in every place.

1. By boundless knowledge. 2. By a general influence. 3. By an universal direction.

1. The first idea of God's omnipresence is his omniscience. God is every where present, because he seeth all. This the prophet had principally in view. "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me," &c. Ps. cxxxix. 1—4.

2. God knows all the effects of matter. He calls into being matter, without motion, and, in some sense, without form. He gives this matter form and motion. He saw that a certain degree of motion, imparted to a certain portion of matter, would produce water; that another degree of motion, communicated to another portion of matter, would produce fire; that another would produce earth; and so of the rest. He foresaw, with the utmost precision, what would result from this water, from this fire, from this earth, when joined together, and agitated by such a degree of motion as he should communicate. By the bare inspection of the laws of motion, he foresaw fires, earthquakes. He foresaw all the vicissitudes of time; he foresaw those which must put a period to time, when "the heavens shall pass away." 2 Peter iii. 10.

3. But, if God could combine all that would result from the laws of motion communicated to matter, he could also combine all that would result from intelligence, freedom of will, and all the faculties which make the essence of spirits; and, before he had formed those spiritual

beings which compose the intelligent world, he knew what all their ideas, all their projects, all their deliberations would be. He says, "he searcheth and knoweth them;" he foresaw, he foretold, the afflictions which Abraham's posterity would endure in Canaan; Gen. xv. 13; the infidelity of the Jews, the faith of the gentiles, the crucifixion of the Messiah. On this article, we are obliged to exclaim, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it!" God is every where, because veils the most impenetrable, darkness the most thick, distance the most immense, can conceal nothing from his knowledge. Soar to the utmost heights, fly to the remotest climates, wrap thyself in the blackest darkness, every where, every where thou wilt be under his eye. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit?" But,

2. The knowledge of God is not a bare knowledge, his presence is not an idle presence; it is an active knowledge, it is a presence accompanied with action and motion. We said, just now, that God was every where, because he influenced all, as far as influence agrees with his perfections.

When new beings appear, he is there; he influences their productions. He gives to all life, motion, and being. "Thou, even thou, art Lord alone, thou hast made heaven." Neh. ix. 6. O Lord, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Ps. cxxxix. 14—16.

When beings are preserved, he is there; he influences preservation. "Thou preservest man and beast." Ps. xxxvi. 6. "When thou openest thine hands they are filled with good." Ps. cxlv. 15. The eyes of all wait upon thee.

When the world is disordered, he is there. He influences wars, pestilence. If nature refuse her productions, it is because he hath "made the heaven as iron, and the earth as brass." It is he "who makes the winds his messengers, and his ministers flames of fire." Ps. civ. 4. Heb. i. 7.

When every thing succeeds according to our wishes, he is there. He influenceth prosperity. "Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it." Ps. cxxvii. 1.

When our understanding is informed, he is there. He influenceth our knowledge. For "in his light we see light. He enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." John i. 9. Luke ii. 32.

When our heart disposeth us to our duties, he is there. He influenceth our virtues. It is he who "worketh in us, both to will and to do. Who giveth to all that ask liberally." James i. 5.

When grossest errors cover us, he is there. He influenceth errors. It is God who "sends strong delusions. Go, make the heart of this people fat." Isa. vi. 10.

When we live, when we die, he is there. He influenceth life and death. Man's days are determined, the number of his months are with him. To God the Lord belong the issues of death. "He bringeth down to the grave." 1 Sam. ii. 6.

He influenceth the least events, as well as the most considerable. "The hairs of our head are numbered;" even "a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his will." Matt. x. 29, 30. But,

3. When God communicates himself to all, when he thus acts on all,

and diffuseth himself through the whole, he connects all with his own designs. God is present with all, because he directs all.

Doth he call creatures into existence? It is to manifest his perfections; it is to have subjects on whom he may shower his favors; it is, as it were, to go out of himself, and to form through the whole universe, a concert resounding the Creator's existence and glory: For the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and godhead, are understood by the things that are made. "The heavens declare the glory of God." Ps. xix. 1—3.

Doth he preserve creatures? It is to answer his own designs: the depth of which no finite mind can fathom; but which we shall one day know, and admire his wisdom.

Doth he send plagues, wars, famine? It is to make those feel his justice, who have abused his goodness.

Doth he afford prosperity? It is to "draw us with the bands of love." Hos. xi. 4.

Doth he impart knowledge to us? It is to discover the snares that surround us, the miseries that threaten us, the origin from which we spring, the course of life we should follow, and the end at which we should aim.

Doth he communicate virtues? It is to animate us in our race: to convince us there is a mighty arm to raise us from the abyss into which our natural corruption hath plunged us: it is that we may "work out our salvation with fear and trembling; knowing that God worketh in us." Phil. ii. 12.

Doth he send error? It is to make us respect that truth which we have resisted.

Doth he prolong our life? It is because he is long-suffering to us. He opens in our favor "the riches of his goodness and forbearance, to lead us to repentance." Rom. ii. 4.

Doth he call us to die? It is to open those eternal books in which our actions are registered; it is to gather our souls into his bosom, "to bind them up in the bundle of life;" to mix them with the ransomed armies "of all nations, tongues, and people." Rev. vii. 9.

Such are our ideas of the omnipresence of God. Then God seeth all, influenceth all, directeth all. In this sense we are to understand this magnificent language of scripture: "Behold, the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee. Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool." This was our prophet's meaning throughout the psalm, "O Lord, thou hast searched me," verse 1, &c.

Inference.

From this idea of God, we see all the virtues issue which religion prescribes.

If such be the grandeur of our God, what ought our repentance to be, who have provoked him to jealousy, as if we had been stronger than he; insulted that majesty which angels adore?

If such be the grandeur of God, what should be our humility? What are we? A grain of dust, a point, an atom, a nothing.

If such be the grandeur of God, what ought our confidence to be? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Rom. viii. 30.

But, above all, if such be the grandeur of God, if God be every where present, what should our vigilance be? What impression should this thought make on reasonable souls, "Thou God seest me!"

THE POWER OF GOD.

*Lo! these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him!
But the thunder of his power who can understand?—Job. xxvi. 14.*

BILDAD had, in the foregoing chapter, entertained Job with a discourse of the dominion and power of God, and the purity of his righteousness; whence he argues an impossibility of the justification of man in his presence, who is no better than a worm. Job, in this chapter, acknowledges the greatness of God's power, and descants more largely upon it than Bildad had done; but both preach it with a kind of ironical speech, as if he had not acted a friendly part, or said little to the purpose. The subject of Job's discourse was the outward prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the godly; and Bildad reads him a lecture of the extent of God's dominion, the number of his armies, and the unspotted rectitude of his nature, in comparison of which the purest creatures are foul. Job, therefore, taxeth him, verse 1—4, that he had not touched the point, but rambled from the subject in hand: "How hast thou helped him that is without power?" Your discourse is so impertinent, that it will neither strengthen the weak nor instruct the simple; but, since Bildad would take up the argument of God's power, Job would show that he wanted not his instructions on that subject, that he had more distinct conceptions of it than his antagonist had uttered, and therefore, (from verse 5 to the end of the chapter,) he treats the subject in a magnificent manner, and concludes in the words of the text, "Lo! these are parts of his ways," &c.

The nature of God's power.

Power sometimes signifies authority; but the power of God in the text does not signify his authority, but his strength.

1. The power of God is that ability, or strength, whereby he can bring to pass whatsoever he pleaseth; whatsoever his infinite wisdom can direct, and the unspotted purity of his will resolve. His council shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. He hath done whatsoever pleaseth him.

2. The power of God gives activity to all the other perfections of his nature. As holiness is the beauty, so power is the life of his attributes in their exercise. God hath a powerful wisdom to attain his ends without interruption, a powerful mercy to remove our misery, a powerful justice to punish offenders, a powerful truth to perform all his promises.

3. This power is originally and essentially in his nature. The strength and power of princes is originally in their people, and only managed by their authority to command; but the power of God is not derived from any thing without him, but essentially in himself. Power belongeth unto God; and all the power that the creature possesses is derived from him.

4. Hence it follows, that the power of God is infinite. What is the exceeding greatness of his power? According to the working of his mighty power. Nothing can be too difficult for the divine power to effect. Is any thing too hard for the Lord? A power which cannot be opposed. None can stay his hand.

I. Wherein the power of God is manifested.

1. In creation. With what majestic lines doth God set forth his power in the works of creation! "The firmament showeth his handy-work, and the heavens are the work of his fingers," therefore called the firmament of his power. And he only spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast. "Let there be light, and there was light." Gen. i. 3.

II. The power of God is made manifest in the government of the world.

1. In preservation, or natural government, God is the great Father of the universe, to nourish as well as create it. Col. i. 16, 17. Thou, Lord, preservest man and beast. As they were created by his word, they are supported by the same. He openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living creature. It is by his power the heavenly bodies have rolled in their spheres, and the tumultuous elements have persisted in their order. He holds the waters in the hollow of his hand, and weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, and in him we live, move, and have our being.

It is no small argument of omnipotence, to keep all the strings of nature in tune, to wind them up to a due pitch for the harmony he intended, and prevent those jarrings which would naturally result from their opposite qualities.

III. This power is evident in moral government.

1. In the restraint of the malicious nature of Satan. Since Satan hath the power of an angel and the malice of a devil, what safety would there be for our persons, did not the Lord restrain his malice? It is a part of the strength as well as the wisdom of God, that the deceived and the deceiver are his. Wisdom to defeat, and power to overrule the malicious designs of Satan to his own glory.

2. In the restraint of the wickedness of man. What havoc hath this made in the world! "From whence come wars?" James i. 4. But had not the Lord, by his power, restrained these, how would the world be drenched in blood! The Lord not only restrains, but overrules the wickedness of man. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee." Psa. lxxvi. 10.

IV. In his gracious government.

1. In the deliverance of his church. He is the strength of Israel. 1 Sam. xv. 29. He hath preserved his little flock in the midst of the wolves, and maintained their standing, when the strongest kingdoms have been sunk, and the best jointed states have been broken in pieces. This power shone forth in the deliverance of his people in the Red Sea, and also in the destruction of their enemies. "He showed strength with his arm, he scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." Luke i. 51—53.

2. In effecting his purposes by small means. As he magnifies his

wisdom by using ignorant instruments, so he exalts his power by the weak. By the motion of Moses' rod he works wonders in the court of Pharaoh. The walls of Jericho, falling at the sound of the rams' horns, was a more glorious display of the power of God than if Joshua had battered them down with the engines of war. Goliath, a giant, levelled with the ground by the force of a sling, from the hand of a stripling, is a more glorious character of the power of God, than if a warlike Israelite in Saul's armour had hewed him to pieces.

3. In the work of our redemption. As Christ is called the wisdom of God, so he is called the power of God. 1 Cor. i. 24. The arm of power was lifted up as high as the designs of wisdom were laid deep; as this way of redemption could not be contrived but by an infinite wisdom, so it could not be accomplished but by infinite power. This will appear,

I. In the person redeeming.—The union of the two natures in the person of Christ. "The seed of David according to the flesh." 1 Tim. iii. 16. An immortal spirit and dying flesh. Infinite purity and a reputed sinner. Omniscience and ignorance. Immutability and changeableness. Human weakness and Almighty power. A God of blessedness and a man of sorrow. "The word made flesh." John i. 14. When we consider the power of God manifested in this union we are lost. That God upon a throne should be an infant in a cradle. The thundering Creator be a weeping babe and a suffering man.

1. In the progress of his life. In the miracles he wrought. How did he expel the powers of darkness? By a word and touch sight is restored to the blind, hearing to the deaf, healing to the sick, life to the dead. Mat. iv. 22, 23.

2. In his resurrection. The unlocking of the belly of the fish for the deliverance of Jonah, the rescue of Daniel from the den of lions, and the three Hebrew worthies from fire, were signal declarations of his power, yet but faint representations of the resurrection of Jesus. This was an hyperbole of power. The exceeding greatness of power, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead. Eph. i. 19—23.

II. In the publication of it.

1. The power of God was manifested in the instruments. Men of a low condition, meanly bred, so far from any splendid estates, that they possessed only their nets; without credit or reputation in the world; without comeliness or strength; as unfit to conquer the world by preaching, as an army of hares were to conquer it by war. Not learned doctors, bred up at the feet of the famous rabbins at Jerusalem, whom Paul calls the princes of this world, nor nursed up in the school of Athens. Not the wise men of Greece, but the fishermen of Galilee are employed to publish the gospel of Christ. The heavenly treasure was placed in these earthen vessels. As Gideon's lamps in empty pitchers, that the excellency of the power might be of God. 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

2. In the success of their ministry. These poor fishermen, tent-makers, ignorant men, without letters, without arms, without power, without intrigues, without human help, without philosophy, without eloquence, contemptible and persecuted people, triumphed over the whole

world with the sound of their voice. Idols fell, temples were demolished, oracles were struck dumb, the reign of the devil was abolished, the strongest inclinations of nature were diverted, people's ancient habits were changed, they flocked in crowds to adore Jesus; whole provinces presented themselves at the foot of the cross. This is the finger of God, nay, more, this is the out-stretched arm of Jehovah. 2 Cor. iv. 7.

To conclude.

1. Here is comfort in all afflictions. Our evils can never be so great to distress us, as his power is to deliver. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Rom. viii. 31,

2. This doctrine teaches us the fear of God. "Who would not fear thee, O thou king of nations?" For, if God be against us, it matters not who they be that are for us. Fear him, therefore, who hath power to cast into hell. Luke xii. 4, 5.

THE WISDOM OF GOD.

To God only wise.—Rom. xvi. 27.

WISDOM is a transcendent excellency of the Divine nature. Most confound the knowledge and wisdom of God together; but there is a manifest distinction between them in our conception.

I. Show what wisdom is.—Wisdom consists,

1. In acting for a right end, and choosing proper means. To shoot at random is a mark of folly. As he is the wisest man that hath the noblest end and the most proper means, so God is infinitely wise; as he is the most excellent being, so he hath the most excellent end. "Of him, and through him, and to him are all things." Rom. xi. 36.

2. Wisdom consists in observing all circumstances for action. He is counted a wise man that lays hold of the fittest opportunities to bring about his designs. God hath all the circumstances of things in one entire image before him. It is impossible he should be mistaken, or miss of the due season of bringing about his own purposes. The time of our Saviour's incarnation is called the fulness of time, the proper season for his coming. Gal. iv. 4.

3. In willing and acting according to the right judgment. We never count a wilful man a wise man. The resolves and ways of God are not mere will, but well guided by the reason and counsel of his own infinite understanding. Who worketh all things. Eph. i. 11. All his ways are judgment. Deut. xxxii. 4.

There is an essential and personal wisdom of God. The essential wisdom is the essence of God; the personal wisdom is the Son of God. 1 Cor. i. 24. God is originally wise. "Who hath been his counselor?" Rom. xi. 34. God is perfectly wise. There is no cloud upon his understanding. Ps. cxlvii. 5. God is perpetually wise. His counsel stands like an immovable rock. God is incomprehensibly wise. His thoughts are deep. Ps. xcii. 5. His judgments unsearchable. Depths that cannot be fathomed. Rom. xi. 33. O the depth! Job xi. 6, 7. God is infallibly wise. The wisest men meet with rubs in the

way. God always compasses his ends. There is no wisdom. Isa. lv. 11. His word that goeth forth. Isa. xiv. 24—27. As he thinks, so shall it come to pass.

II. Wherein the wisdom of God appears.

I. In creation. The whole creation is a poem, every species a stanza, and every individual creature a verse in it. "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth." Prov. iii. 19. "He hath established the world by his wisdom." Jer. x. 12. There is not any thing so mean, so small, but shines with a beam of Divine wisdom. "In wisdom hast thou made them all." Ps. civ. 24. This wisdom of the creation appears,

1. In the variety. "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!" How great a variety is there of animals, plants, colours. Gen. i. 11. 20—24.

2. In the beauty and order. Eccles. iii. 11. "He hath made every thing beautiful." All the creatures are as so many pictures, or statues, exactly framed by line. "Their line is gone." Ps. xix. 4.

3. In the fitness of every thing for its end. After the most diligent inspection, there can be found nothing unprofitable. The earth is fitted into its parts: the valleys are appointed for granaries, the mountains to shadow them; the rivers, like veins, carry refreshment. "There he causes the grass to grow." Ps. civ. 14. The sea is fitted for its use; it is a fish-pond, for the nourishment of man; it joins nations: a great vessel for commerce. "There go the ships." Ps. civ. 26. Showers are appointed to refresh the bodies, to open the womb of the earth. "To make it fruitful." Ps. civ. 3. Winds are fitted to purify the air, to carry the clouds, to refresh the earth. "He walketh on the winds." Ps. civ. 3. Rivers are appointed to bathe the earth; they are the water-pots of the earth. Ps. civ. 10, 12, 13. Trees are for the habitations of birds. The seasons have their uses. The days and nights have also their usefulness. Ps. lxxxiv. 16, 17; civ. 23.

4. This wisdom is apparent, in the linking all those useful parts together. All parts are exactly suited to one another, and every part to the whole. "The heavens hear the earth." Hos. ii. 21, 22.

III. In his government, especially of man.

I. In his government of him as a rational creature, in the law he gives him.

1. It is suited to the nature of man.

2. To his happiness. "Rejoicing his heart." Ps. xix. 7, 8. Deut. iv. 8.

3. In suiting his laws to his conscience. "The gentiles do by nature." Rom. ii. 14. Conscience dictates that the law is worthy to be observed.

4. In the encouragement he gives. "In keeping thy commandments." Ps. xix. 11.

II. God's wisdom appears in the government of man as a fallen creature.

1. In the bounding of sin. "The wrath of man." Ps. lxxvi. 10.

2. In overruling it to his own glory and our good. "As sin reigned unto death." Rom. v. 21.

3. In the work of redemption. In which he manifested the greatest hatred to sin, and the greatest love to the sinner. "Herein is love." "God so loved the world." John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10.

4. In overturning the empire of Satan. "Through death." Heb. ii. 14. Thus the devil ruined his own kingdom, whilst he thought to establish it.

5. In the manner of publishing the doctrine of redemption. In the general discoveries of it to Abraham and Moses; the time and circumstances of the first publication of the gospel by the apostles. Acts ii. 1—12. In the instruments employed; he did not employ philosophers, but fishermen. "The foolishness of God is wiser than men." In the ways and manner: by ways seemingly contrary; by scattering of the disciples, it inflamed their courage, and spread their doctrine. "Many shall run to and fro." Dan. xii. 4. The flames of the martyrs brightened the doctrine. Religion grew stronger by sufferings; making the "wisdom of this world foolishness with God."

To conclude—we may hence see,

1. The right and fitness of God for the government of the world. Power and wisdom are the two arms of authority.

2. That God is a proper object for our trust and confidence. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver." Job. v. 13. "He taketh the wise." Ps. xxxii. 7.

3. Meditate on the wisdom of God, as manifested in creation. "When I consider the heavens." Ps. viii. 4, 5. In redemption; shall the angels be ravished with it, and bend themselves down to study it, and shall not we admire it? Prov. ii. 1—6.

4. Let us seek to God for wisdom. "If any man lack wisdom." Jam. i. 5. "There is a spirit in man." Job xxxii. 8.

Submit to the wisdom of God in all cases; he is a God of judgment. Isa. xxx. 18. Deut. xxxii. 4.

ON THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?—Ex. xv. 11.

THIS verse is one of the loftiest descriptions of the majesty and excellence of God, in the whole scripture. It is a part of Moses' triumphant song, after a great, and real, and a typical victory: in the womb of which all the deliverances of the church were couched. It is the first song upon holy record, and it consists of congratulatory and prophetic matter. It casts a look backward to what God did for them in our deliverance from Egypt; and a look forward to what God shall do for the church in future ages.

It consists of, 1. A preface, verse 1—"I will sing unto the Lord."

2. An historical narration of matter of fact, verses 3, 4. "Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the Red Sea."

Let these two things be considered. If any, this attribute hath an excellency above his other perfections; none is sounded out so loftily, with such solemnity, and so frequently by angels, as this. Isa. vi. 3. "Holy, holy, holy." Rev. iv. 8. He singles it out to swear by. "Once

have I sworn by my holiness." Ps. lxxxix. 35. "The Lord will swear by his holiness." Amos iv. 2. It is glory and beauty. Power is his hand and arm, omniscience his eye, mercy his bowels, eternity his duration, his holiness is his beauty. "Should praise the beauty of holiness." 2 Chron. xx. 21. It is his very life. So it is called. "Alienated from the life of God;" Eph. iv. 18; that is, from the holiness of God. "Be you holy, as I am holy."

I. The nature of divine holiness.

The holiness of God, negatively, is a perfect and unpolled freedom from all evil; as we call gold pure that is not embased by any dross.

Positively, it is the rectitude or integrity of the divine nature; or that conformity of it in affection and action of the divine will, whereby he hath a delight and complacency in every thing agreeable to his will.

As there is no darkness in his understanding, so there is no spot in his will. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness." Ps. xi. 7.

This property of the divine nature is,

1. An essential and necessary perfection; he is essentially and necessarily holy. His holiness is as necessary as his being.

2. God is only absolutely holy: "There is none holy as the Lord." 1 Sam. ii. 2. It is the peculiar glory of his nature; he is not only holy, but holiness. Holiness, in the highest degree, is his sole prerogative.

3. God is so holy, that he cannot possibly approve of any evil done by another, but doth perfectly abhor it; would not else be a glorious holiness. "He hath no pleasure in wickedness." Ps. v. 4.

1. He abhors it necessarily. Holiness is the glory of the Deity, therefore necessary. The nature of God is so holy, that he cannot but hate it. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil." Hab. i. 13. He is more opposite to it than light to darkness; and therefore it can expect no countenance from him.

2. Therefore intensely. Nothing do men act for more than their glory. He hates the first spark of it in the imagination. Zech. viii. 17. With what variety of expressions doth he repeat his indignation at their polluted services! Amos v. 21, 22; so Isa. i. 14. It is the abominable thing that he hates; Jer. xlv. 4; he is vexed and fretted at it; Isa. lxiii. 10; Ezek. xvi. 43; he abhors it so, that his hatred redounds upon the person that commits it. "He hates all workers of iniquity." Ps. v. 5.

3. Therefore, universally, because necessarily and intensely. He doth not hate it in one, and indulge it in another, but loathes it wherever he finds it; not one worker of iniquity is exempt from it. "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity." Ps. v. 5.

4. Perpetually. This must necessarily follow upon the others. He can no more cease to hate impurity, than he can cease to love holiness. James i. 17. God is always the same, without any shadow of change; and "is angry with the wicked every day;" Ps. vii. 11; *i. e.* uninter-ruptedly.

5. God is so holy, that he cannot but love holiness in others. Not that he owes any thing to his creatures, but from the unspeakable holiness of his nature. "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness." Ps. xi. 7.

6. God is so holy, that he cannot possibly will, or encourage sin in any. How can he give any encouragement to that which he cannot in

the least approve? Light may sooner be the cause of darkness, than he that is the Fountain of good should be the source of evil. James iii. 11.

1. God cannot commit any unrighteousness.

2. Nor can God secretly inspire any evil into us.

3. Nor can God necessitate man to sin. Indeed sin cannot be committed by force; there is no sin but is in some sort voluntary.

II. The demonstration of it.

1. His holiness appears as he is Creator, in framing man in a perfect uprightness. Angels, as made by God, could not be evil; for God beheld his own works with pleasure, and could not have pronounced them all good, had some been created pure, and others impure; two moral contrarieties could not be good. Human nature was well strung and tuned by God, according to the note of his own holiness. "God hath made man upright." Eccles. vii. 29. Other creatures were his footsteps, but man was his image. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness;" Gen. i. 26; which, though it seem to imply no more in that place, than an image of his dominion over the creatures, yet the apostle raises it a peg higher, and gives us a larger interpretation. "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him;" Col. iii. 10; making it to consist in a resemblance to his righteousness.

2. His holiness appears in his laws; and he is a lawgiver and a judge. Man was bound to be subject to God, as a creature, and had a capacity to be ruled by the law. "What nation hath statutes and judgments so righteous?" Deut. iv. 8. They are compared to fine gold, that hath no speck nor dross. Ps. xix. 10.

This purity is evident,

In the moral law; which is therefore dignified with the title of holy twice in one verse. "Wherefore the law is holy." Rom. vii. 12.

1. The purity of the law is seen in the matter of it. It prescribes all that becomes a creature towards God, and all that becomes one creature towards another. "Wherefore the law is holy." The purity of this beam and transcript of God, bears witness to a greater clearness and beauty in the sun and original. Undeiled streams manifest an untainted fountain.

2. It is seen in the manner of his precepts. As it prescribes all good, and forbids all evil; so it doth enjoin the one, and banish the other, as such. The laws of men command virtuous things; not as virtuous in themselves, but as useful for human society. But God commands that which is just in itself; enjoins virtues as virtues, and prohibits vices as vices.

3. In the spiritual extent of it. It frowns upon all stains and pollutions of the most retired thoughts; hence the apostle calls it a spiritual law. Rom. vii. 14.

4. In regard to the perpetuity of it. The purity and perpetuity of it are linked together by the Psalmist. "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever." Ps. xix. 9.

5. This holiness appears in the allurements annexed to the law for keeping it, and the affrightments to restrain from the breaking of it; both promises and threatenings have their fundamental root in the holiness

of God. "Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." 2 Cor. vii. 1.

6. His holiness appears in the judgments inflicted for the violation of this law. Divine holiness is the root of divine justice, and divine justice is the triumph of divine holiness. Ps. ciii. 6. Dan. ix. 7. Ps. xi. 6, 7.

1. How severely hath he punished his most noble creatures for it!

2. How detestable to him are the very instruments of sin! Gen. iii. 14. Deut. vii. 25, 26. So contrary is the holy nature of God to every sin, that it curseth every thing that is instrumental in it.

3. How detestable is every thing to him that is in the sinner's possession! The very earth, which God had made Adam the proprietor of, was "cursed for his sake." Gen. iii. 17, 18. It lost its beauty, and lies languishing to this day. Rom. viii. 20—22.

What design hath God in all these acts of severity and vindictive justice, but to set off the lustre of his holiness?

III. The holiness of God appears in our restoration. It is in the glass of the gospel we behold the glory of the Lord; 2 Cor. iii. 18; that is, the glory of the Lord, into whose image we are changed; but we are changed into nothing, as the image of God, but into holiness. Isa. i. 27.

1. This holiness of God appears in the manner of our restoration, viz. by the death of Christ. Not all the vials of judgments that have, or shall be poured out upon the wicked world, nor the flaming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the irreversible sentence pronounced against the rebellious devils, nor the groans of the damned creatures, give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as the wrath of God let loose upon his Son.

It appears the more, if you consider,

1. The dignity of the Redeemer's person. One that had been from eternity, had laid the foundations of the world; had been the object of the divine delight: he that was "God blessed for ever," becomes a curse. One equal to him in all the glorious perfections of his nature, Phil. ii. 6, dies on a disgraceful cross, and is exposed to the flames of divine wrath, rather than sin should live.

2. The near relation he stood in to the Father. He was his own Son that he delivered up. Rom. viii. 32. His essential image, as dearly beloved by him as himself; yet he would abate nothing of his hatred of those sins imputed to one so dear to him.

3. The value he puts upon his holiness appears further, in the advancement of this redeeming person after his death. Our Saviour was advanced, not barely for his dying, but for the respect he had in his death to this attribute of God. "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity." Heb. i. 9.

4. It may be further considered, that in this way of redemption his holiness in the hatred of sin seems to be valued above any other attribute. He proclaims the value of it above the person of his Son. In this way of redemption the odiousness of sin is equally discovered with the greatest of his compassions: an infinite abhorrence of sin, and an infinite love to the world, march hand in hand together. Sin is made the

chief mark of his displeasure, while the poor creature is made the highest object of divine pity: in this way "mercy and truth," &c. Ps. lxxxv. 10.

2. The holiness of God in his hatred of sin appears in our justification, and the conditions he requires of all that would enjoy the benefit of redemption. Our justification is not by the imperfect works of creatures, but by an exact and infinite righteousness. Faith is the condition God requires to justification; not a dead, but an active faith; such a "faith as purifies the heart." James ii. 20. Acts xv. 9. He calls for repentance, which is a moral retracting our offences. He requires mortification, which is called crucifying; whereby a man would strike as full and deadly a blow at his lusts, as was struck at Christ upon the cross. There is no admittance into heaven of a starting, but a persevering holiness, a "patient continuance in well-doing." Rom. ii. 7.

3. It appears in the actual regeneration of the soul, and a carrying it on to a full perfection. Our pardon is a fruit of his mercy, our knowledge a stream from his wisdom, our strength an impression of his power; so our purity is a beam from his holiness. "Holy Father, keep them through thy own name, and sanctify them through thy truth;" John xvii. 17. Heb. xiii. 12; as the proper source whence holiness was to flow to the creature: as the sun is the proper fountain whence light is derived, both to the stars above and bodies here below. Hence he is not only called holy, but the "Holy One of Israel." Isa. xliii. 15.

To conclude.

1. There can be no communion between God and unholy spirits. Can there be any delightful communion between those whose natures are contrary? Darkness and light may as soon kiss each other, and become one nature; God and the devil may as soon enter into an eternal league and covenant together; for God to have pleasure in wickedness, and to admit evil to dwell with him, are things equally impossible to his nature. 2 Cor. vi. 14—16.

2. Hence it will follow, there is no justification of a sinner by any thing in himself. "Who hath made us accepted in the Beloved." Eph. i. 6. The infinite purity of God is so glorious that it shames the holiness of angels, as the light of the sun dims the light of the fire.

3. This attribute renders God a fit object for trust and dependence. The notion of an unholy and unrighteous God is an uncomfortable idea of him, and beats off our hands from laying any hold of him: "Fear not, thou worm Jacob;" Isa. xli. 14; he will be in his actions what he is in his nature.

4. A sense of this will render us humble in the possession of the greatest holiness a creature is capable of. We are apt to be proud with the Pharisee; but let any clap their wings, if they can, in a vain boasting and exaltation, when they view the holiness of this God. "Who can stand before this holy Lord God?"

5. This would make us full of an affectionate reverence in all our approaches to God. By this perfection God is rendered venerable, and fit to be revered by his creature; and magnificent thoughts of it in the creature would awaken him to an actual reverence of the Divine Majesty. "Holy and reverend is his name." Ps. cxi. 9; xlvii. 8.

6. A due sense of this perfection would inflame us with a vehement

desire to be conformed to him. Contemplating it as it shines forth in the face of Christ will transform us into the same image.

7. Let us seek for holiness to God, the fountain of it. As he is the author of bodily life in the creature, so he is the author of his own life, the life of God in the soul. By his holiness he makes men holy, as the sun by his light enlightens the air. He is not the Holy One, but our Holy One. Isa. xliii. 15. The Lord that sanctifies us. Lev. xx. 8. As he hath mercy to pardon us, so he hath holiness to purify us; the excellency of being a sun to comfort us, and a shield to protect us, giving grace and glory. Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

ON THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God.—Mark x. 18.

TRULY “God is good.” Ps. lxxiii. 1. All nations in the world have acknowledged this truth. The notion of goodness is inseparable from the notion of a God. We cannot own the existence of God, but we must confess also his goodness.

I. What this goodness is.

There is a goodness of being, which is the natural perfection of a thing; there is a goodness of will, which is the holiness and righteousness of a person; there is the goodness of the hand, which we call liberality or beneficence, a doing good to others.

1. We mean not by this, the goodness of his essence, or the perfection of his nature. God is thus good, because his name is infinitely perfect; he hath all things requisite to the completing of a most perfect and sovereign being. All good meets in his essence, as all water meets in the ocean.

2. Nor is it the same with the blessedness of God, but something flowing from his blessedness. Were he not first infinitely blessed, and full in himself, he could not be infinitely good and diffusive to us.

Had not the sun a fulness of light in itself, and the sea a vastness of water, the one could not enrich the world with his beams, nor the other fill every creek with its waters.

3. Nor is it the same with the holiness of God. The holiness of God is the rectitude of his nature. The goodness of God is the efflux of his will, whereby he is beneficial to his creatures: “The Lord is good to all.” Ps. cxlvii. 1.

4. Nor is this goodness of God the same with the mercy of God. Goodness extends to more objects than mercy; goodness stretcheth itself out to all the works of his hands; mercy extends only to a miserable object.

By goodness is meant,

1. The bounty of God. This is the notion of goodness in the world: when we say a good man, we mean either a holy man in his life, or a charitable and liberal man in the management of his goods. As God

is great and powerful, he is the object of our understanding; but as good and bountiful, he is the object of our love and desire.

2. The goodness of God comprehends all his attributes. All the acts of God are nothing else but the effluxes of his goodness, distinguished by several names, according to the objects it is exercised about. As the sea, though it be one mass of water, yet we distinguish it by several names, according to the shores it washes and beats upon. When Moses longed to see his glory, God tells him he would give him a prospect of his goodness. "I will make all my goodness." Ex. xxxiii. 19. The whole catalogue of "mercy, grace, long-suffering;" Ex. xxxiv. 6; all are streams from this fountain. When he confers happiness without merit, it is grace; when he bestows happiness against merit, it is mercy; when he bears with provoking rebels, it is long-suffering; when he performs his promise, it is truth; when he commiserates a distressed person, it is pity; when he supplies an indigent person, it is bounty; when he succours an innocent person, it is righteousness, and when he pardons a penitent person, it is mercy; all summed up in this one name of goodness. "They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness." Ps. cxlv. 7. 8.

II. The nature of this goodness.

1. He is good by his own essence. God is not only good in his essence, but good by his essence. Hence his goodness must be infinite, and circumscribed by no limits; the exercise of his goodness may be limited by himself; but his goodness, the principle, cannot; for since his essence is infinite, and his goodness is not distinguished from his essence, it is infinite also. He is essentially good by his own essence, therefore good of himself, therefore eternally and abundantly good.

2. God is the prime and chief goodness. Being good by his own essence, he must needs be the chief goodness, in whom there can be nothing but good, from whom there can proceed nothing but good, to whom all good whatsoever must be referred, as the final cause of all good. As he is the chief being, so he is the chief good. Ps. xvi. 2. Our goodness extends not to him: wickedness may hurt a man, as we are, and our righteousness may profit the son of man; but, if we be righteous, "what give we to him, or what receives he at our hands?" Job xxxv. 7, 8. God is all good; other things are good in their kind, as a good man, a good angel. He is no less all good than he is almighty.

3. This goodness is communicative. None so communicatively good as God. As the notion of God includes goodness, so the notion of goodness includes diffusiveness; without goodness he would cease to be a Deity, and without diffusiveness he would cease to be good. "Thou art good, and doest good." Ps. cxix. 68.

4. God is necessarily good. None is necessarily good but God; he is as necessarily good as he is necessarily God. His goodness is as inseparable from his nature as his holiness.

5. Though he be necessarily good, yet he is also freely good. The necessity of the goodness of his nature hinders not the liberty of his actions. It would not be a supreme goodness, if it were not a voluntary goodness. It is agreeable to the nature of the highest good, to be abso-

lutely free, to dispense his goodness in what methods and measures he pleaseth.

6. This goodness is communicated with the greatest pleasure. Moses desired to see his glory; God assures him he should see his goodness; Ex. xxxiii. 18, 19; intimating that his goodness is his glory, and his glory his delight also. He prevents men with his blessings of goodness. Ps. xxi. 3. He is most delighted when he is most diffusive. He is not covetous of his own treasures. It is the nature of his goodness to be glad of men's solicitations for it.

III. The manifestation of this goodness.

1. In creation. His goodness was the cause that he made any thing, and his wisdom was the cause that he made every thing in order and harmony; he pronounced "every thing good." Gen. i. 31.

1. The creation proceeds from goodness. Because God is good, things have a being; if he had not been good, nothing could have been good; nothing could have imparted that which it did not possess.

2. Creation was the first act of goodness without himself. Creation was the first efflux of his goodness without himself; and therefore it was the speech of a heathen, "That when God first set upon the creation of the world, he transformed himself into love and goodness."

3. There is not one creature but hath a character of his goodness. The whole world is a map to represent, and a herald to proclaim this perfection. "He is good to all:" Ps. cxlv. 9: he is therefore good in all; not a drop of the creation but is a drop of his goodness. These are the colours worn upon the heads of every creature. As in every spark the light of the fire is manifested, so doth every grain of the creation wear the visible badges of this perfection.

But, let us see the goodness of God in the creation of man.

1. How much of goodness is visible in his body! How neatly hath he wrought this "tabernacle of clay, this earthly house!" as the apostle calls it. A curious wrought-piece of needle-work, a comely artifice; an embroidered case for an harmonious lute. It is a cabinet fitted by divine goodness for the enclosing a rich jewel; a palace made of dust, to lodge in it the viceroy of the world.

2. But what is this to that goodness which shines in the nature of the soul! Who can express the wonders of that comeliness that is wrapt up in this mask of clay? A soul endued with a clearness of understanding and freedom of will. A soul that excelled the whole world, that comprehended the whole creation. In the ruins of a palace we may see the curiosity displayed, and the cost expended in the building of it; in the ruins of this fallen structure we still find it capable of a mighty knowledge.

3. Besides this, he did not only make man so noble a creature in his frame, but he made him after his own image in holiness. He imparted to him a spark of his own comeliness, in order to a communion with himself in happiness. He made man after his image, after his own image.

4. The goodness of God appears in the conveniences he provided for, and gave to man.

1. The world was made for man. God put all things under his feet,

and gave him a deputed dominion over the rest of the creatures under himself, as the absolute sovereign. "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands." Ps. viii. 6.

2. God richly furnished the world for man. He did not only erect a stately palace for his habitation, but provided all kind of furniture, as a mark of his goodness, for the entertainment of his creature man; he arched over his habitation with a bespangled heaven, and floored it with a solid earth. Ps. civ. 14.

3. The goodness of God appears in the laws he has given to man, and the covenant he hath made with him.

1. In fitting the law to the nature of man. It was rather below than above his strength; he had an integrity in his nature to answer the righteousness of his precept. "God created man upright;" Eccles. vii. 29; his nature was suited to the law, and the law to his nature.

2. In fitting it for the happiness of man. For the satisfaction of his soul, which finds a reward in the very act of keeping it. Ps. cxix. 165.

3. In engaging man to obedience by promises and threatenings. A threatening is only mentioned, Gen. ii. 17, but a promise is implied.

2. In redemption. The whole gospel is nothing but one entire mirror of divine goodness: the whole of redemption is wrapt up in that one expression of the angel's song, "Good-will towards men." Luke ii. 14.

1. Goodness was the spring of redemption. All and every part of it owes only to this perfection the appearance of it in the world. 1 John iv. 8.

2. It was a pure goodness. He was under no obligation to pity our misery, and repair our ruins; he might have stood to the terms of the first covenant, and exacted our eternal death, since we have committed an infinite transgression.

3. Hence we may consider the height of this goodness in redemption to exceed that in creation. His goodness in the latter is more astonishing to our belief than his goodness in creation is visible to our eye. There is more of his bounty expressed in that one verse, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son," John iii. 16, than there is in the whole volume of the world. In creation, he formed an innocent creature of the dust of the ground; in redemption, he restores a rebellious creature by the blood of his Son.

4. The goodness of God in his government. That goodness that despised not their creation, doth not despise their conduct. The same goodness that was the head that framed them, is the helm that guides them.

1. This goodness is evident in the care he hath of all creatures. There is a peculiar goodness to his people; but this takes not away his general goodness to the world. "The earth is full of his riches." Ps. civ. 24. The whole world swims in the rich bounty of the Creator. The goodness of God is the river that waters the whole earth. His goodness is seen in preserving all things. "O Lord, thou preservest man and beast." Ps. xxxvi. 6. He visits man every day, and makes him feel the effects of his providence, in giving him "fruitful seasons, and filling his heart with food and gladness," Acts xiv. 17, as

witnesses of his liberality and kindness to man. "The earth is visited and watered by the river of God: he crowns the year with his goodness." Ps. xxxiii. 5; lxx. 11.

2. The goodness of God is seen in taking care of the animals and inanimate things. Divine goodness embraceth in its arms the lowest worm as well as the loftiest cherubim: he provides food for the crying ravens, Ps. cxlii. 9, and a prey for the appetite of the hungry lion, Ps. civ. 21. He clothes the grass, and arrays the lilies of the field with a greater glory than Solomon. Matt. vi. 26—30.

3. Again, the divine goodness is evident in providing a scripture, as a rule to guide us, and continuing it in the world. The scripture was written upon several occasions, yet, in the dictating of it, the goodness of God cast his eye upon the last ages of the world. "They are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." 1 Cor. x. 11. It was given to the Israelites, but divine goodness intended it for the future Gentiles. Thus did divine goodness think of us, and prepare his records for us, before we were in the world. It is clear, to inform our understandings, and rich to comfort us in our misery; it is a light to guide us, and a cordial to refresh us; it is a lamp to our feet, and a medicine for our diseases; a purifier of our filth, and a restorer of us in our faintings. He hath by his goodness sealed the truth of it, by its efficacy on multitudes of men: he hath made it the word of regeneration. James i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23. The divine goodness doth appear in answering prayers. He delights to be familiarly acquainted with his people, and to hear them call upon him. He indulgeth them a free access to him, and delights in every address of an upright man. Isa. lxx. 24. The goodness of God is seen in bearing with the infirmities of his people, and accepting imperfect obedience. He takes notice of a sincere, though chequered obedience to reward it. The goodness of God is seen in afflictions and persecutions; if it be good for us to be afflicted, for which we have the Psalmist's vote, Ps. cxix. 71. "What is man that thou shouldst magnify him?" Job vii. 17.

To conclude.

1. If God be so good, how unworthy is the contempt or abuse of his goodness? Jer. ii. 5. By a forgetfulness of his benefits, we enjoy the mercies, and forget the donor; we take what he gives, and pay not the tribute he deserves. The Israelites forgot God their Saviour, by a distrust of his providence; Num. xiv. 3; thus the Israelites throughout their miraculous deliverance from Egypt. In sinning more freely upon the account of his goodness; in ascribing our benefits to other causes than divine goodness. Thus Israel ascribed her felicity, plenty and success, to her idols, as rewards which her lovers had given her. Hos. ii. 5. 12. "Thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, and brass." Dan. v. 23. This was the proud vaunt of the Assyrian conqueror, for which God threatens to punish the fruit of his stout heart. "By the strength of my hand I have done it." Isa. x. 11—14.

2. It is matter of comfort in afflictions. What can we fear from the conduct of infinite goodness? Can his hand be heavy upon those that are humble before him? They are hands of infinite power in-

deed, but there is not any motion of it. "Grace and glory will he give, and no good thing will he withhold." Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

3. Imitate this goodness of God. "Do good to them that hate you, that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." Mat. v. 44, 45. "Be not overcome of evil." Verse 48.

ON THE DOMINION OF GOD.

The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.—Ps. ciii. 19.

"THE Lord hath prepared;" the word signifies established, as well as prepared. Due preparation is a natural way to the establishment of a thing. Hasty resolves break and moulder. This notes,

The infinity of his authority. He prepares it, none else for him. Readiness to exercise it upon due occasions. He hath prepared his throne; he hath all things ready for the assistance of his people. Wise management of it; it is prepared: preparations imply prudence; the government of God is not a rash and heady authority. Successfulness and duration: he hath prepared or established. It is fixed, not tottering; it is an immovable dominion: all the struggles of men and devils cannot overturn, nor so much as shake it. As his counsel, so his authority shall stand, and "he will do all his pleasure." Isa. xli. 10.

"His throne in the heavens." This is an expression to signify the authority of God; for as God hath no member properly, though he be so represented to us, so he hath properly no throne. It signifies his power of reigning and judging.

"His throne in the heavens," notes,

"The glory of his dominion." The heavens are the most stately and comely pieces of the creation: his majesty is there most visible, his glory most splendid. Ps. xix. 1. The heavens speak out with a full mouth his glory: it is therefore called, "the habitation of his holiness and of his glory." Isa. lxiii. 15. The supremacy of his empire; they are elevated above all earthly empires. Peculiarly of this dominion; he rules in the heavens alone. The vastness of his empire; the earth is but a spot to the heavens. The easiness of managing this government; his being in the heavens renders him capable of doing whatsoever he pleases. Ps. cxv. 3. Duration of it; the heavens are incorruptible. His kingdom rules over all; he hath an absolute right over all things, within the circuit of heaven and earth. 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 12.

Jehovah's dominion is here proclaimed as universal. A dominion over the whole world.

I. I shall state some general propositions for the clearing and confirming this glorious fact.

1. We must know the difference between the power of God and his authority. We commonly mean, by the power of God, the strength

of God, whereby he is able to effect all his purposes. By the authority of God, we mean the right he hath to act what he pleases. Among men, strength and authority are two distinct things. A subject may be a giant, and be stronger than his prince, but he hath not the same authority. Worldly dominion may be seated, not in a brawny arm, but a sickly and infirm body. A greater strength may be settled in the servant, but a greater authority resides in the master. As God is Lord, he hath a right to enact: as he is almighty, he hath a power to execute. His strength is the executive power belonging to his dominion.

2. All the other attributes of God refer to this perfection of dominion. His goodness fits him for it, because he can never use his authority but for the good of the creatures. His wisdom can never be mistaken in the exercise of it; his power can accomplish the decrees that flow from his absolute authority. Without this dominion, some perfections, as justice and mercy, would lie in obscurity, and much of his wisdom would be hid from our sight.

3. This of dominion, as well as that of power, hath been acknowledged by all. The high-priest was to wave the offering, or shake it to and fro, Ex. xxix. 24, which, the Jews say, was customary from east to west, and from north to south, the four quarters of the world, to signify God's sovereignty over all parts of the world. And some of the heathens, in their adorations, turned their bodies to all quarters, to signify the extensive dominion of God throughout the whole earth. It is stamped upon the conscience of man, and flashes in his face, in every act of self-judgment.

4. This notion of sovereignty is inseparable from the notion of God. To acknowledge the existence of a God, and to acknowledge him a rewarder, are linked together. Heb. xi. 6. To acknowledge him a rewarder, is to acknowledge him a governor: rewards being the marks of dominion. We cannot suppose God a creator, without supposing a sovereign dominion in him. No creature can be made without some law in its nature; if it had not law, it would be created to no purpose. It is so inseparable, that it cannot be communicated to any creature. No creature is able to exercise it; every creature is unable to perform all the offices that belong to this dominion.

II. Wherein the dominion of God is founded.

1. On the excellency of his nature. God being an incomprehensible ocean of all perfection, and possessing infinitely all those virtues that may lay a claim to dominion, hath the first foundation of it in his own nature. On this account God claims our obedience. "I am God, and there is none like me:" Isa. xlv. 9: and the prophet Jeremiah on the same account acknowledgeth it, "forasmuch as there is none like unto thee." Jer. x. 6, 7.

2. In his act of creation. He is the sovereign Lord, as he is the almighty Creator. The relation of an entire Creator induceth the relation of an absolute Lord. His dominion of jurisdiction results from creation. When God himself makes an oration in defence of his sovereignty, his chief arguments are drawn from creation, Job xxxviii. and "The Lord is a great King above all gods." Ps. xcv. 3—5. And so the apostle. As he "made the world and all things therein," he is

styled, "Lord of heaven and earth." Acts xvii. 24. His dominion also of property stands upon this basis: "the heavens are thine, the earth also is thine." Ps. lxxxix. 11. On this title of forming Israel as a creature, or rather as a church, he demands their service to him as their sovereign. "O Jacob and Israel, thou art my servant: I have formed thee." Isa. xlv. 21.

3. "As God is the final cause, or end of all, he is Lord of all." God in his actual creation of all, is the sovereign end of all; "for thy pleasure they are and were created." Rev. iv. 11. "The Lord hath made all things for himself." Prov. xvi. 4.

4. The dominion of God is founded upon his preservation of things. "The Lord is a great King above all gods." Ps. xcv. 3, 4. Why? In his hand are all the deep places of the earth. While his hand holds things, his hand hath a dominion over them. The master of this great family may as well be called the Lord of it, since every member of it depends upon him for the support of that being he first gave them. As the right to govern resulted from creation, so it is perpetuated by preservation.

5. The dominion of God is strengthened by the innumerable benefits he bestows upon his creatures. The beneficence of God adds, though not an original right of power, yet a foundation of a stronger, upbraiding the creature if he walk in a violation and forgetfulness of those benefits. "Hear, O heavens; and give ear, O earth." Isa. i. 2. Thus the fundamental right as Creator is made more indisputable by his relation as benefactor. The benefits of God are innumerable. But that benefit of redemption doth add a stronger right of dominion to God; since he not only as the Creator gave being, but paid the price of his Son's blood for their rescue from captivity, so that he hath a sovereignty of grace as well as nature. "Ye are not your own." 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

III. The nature of this dominion.

1. This dominion is independent. His throne is in the heavens: the heavens depend not upon the earth, nor God upon his creatures. Since he is independent in regard of his essence, he is so in his dominion, which flows from the excellency and fulness of his essence.

2. Absolute. If his throne be in the heavens, there is nothing to control him. His authority is unlimited.

1. Absolute in regard of freedom and liberty. Thus creation is a work of mere sovereignty; he created, because it was his pleasure to create. Preservation is the fruit of his sovereignty. Redemption is the fruit of his sovereignty.

2. His dominion is absolute in regard of unlimitedness by any law without him. He is an absolute monarch, that makes laws for his subjects, but receives no rules nor laws from his subjects for the management of his government.

3. In regard of supremacy and uncontrollableness. None can implead him, and cause him to render a reason for his actions. "Who may say unto him, What dost thou?" Eccl. viii. 4. It is an absurd thing for any to dispute with God. "Who art thou, O man?" Rom. ix. 20. In all the desolations he works, he asserts his own supremacy to silence men. "Be still, and know that I am God." Ps. xlv. 10.

4. In regard of irresistibleness. His word is a law; he commands things to stand out of nothing. "He commands light to shine out of darkness." 2 Cor. iv. 6. There is no distance of time between his word. "Let there be light, and there was light." Gen. i. 3. If the Lord will work, "who shall let it?" Isa. xliii. 13. He sets the ordinances of the heavens, and the dominion thereof in the earth. And sends lightnings, that they may go, and say unto him, "Here we are." Job xxxviii. 35.

5. Yet this dominion, though it be absolute, is not tyrannical. If his throne be in the heavens, it is pure and good. This dominion is managed by the rule of wisdom. What may appear to us to have no other spring than absolute sovereignty, would be found to have a depth of amazing wisdom. His sovereignty is managed according to the rule of righteousness. Worldly princes often fancy tyranny and oppression to be the chief marks of sovereignty, and think their sceptres not beautiful till dyed in blood, nor the throne secure till established upon slain carcases. But justice and judgment are the foundation of the throne of God. Ps. lxxxix. 14. In all his ways he is righteous. Ps. cxlv. 17. His sovereignty is managed according to the rule of goodness. Some potentates there have been in the world, that have loved to suck the blood and drink the tears of their subjects, that would rule more by fear than love. God's throne is a throne of holiness, so is it a throne of grace. Heb. iv. 16. A throne encircled with "a rainbow, in sight like unto an emerald." Rev. iv. 3. An emblem of the covenant, that hath the pleasantness of a green colour, delightful to the eye, betokening mercy. If he bind them in fetters, it is to show them their transgressions, and open their ear to discipline, and renewing commands in a more sensible strain, to depart from iniquity.

6. This sovereignty is extensive. He rules all, as the heavens do over the earth. He is King of worlds, King of ages. Earthly kings may step out of their own country into the territory of God. "He hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." Ps. ciii. 19. The heaven of angels and other excellent creatures belong to his authority. He is principally called the Lord of Hosts, in relation to his entire command over the angelic legions. And the inanimate creatures in heaven are at his beck, they are his armies in heaven, disposed in an excellent order in their several ranks. "He calls the stars by name." Ps. cxlvii. 4. "The stars by their influences fight against Sisera." Judges v. 20. And the sun holds in its reins, and stands still, to light Joshua to a complete victory. Josh. x. 12. They are all marshalled in their ranks, to receive his word of command, and fight in close order. And those creatures which mount up from the earth, and take their place in the lower heavens, vapours whereof hail and snow are formed, are part of the army, and do not only receive, but fulfil his word of command. Ps. cxlviii. 8. These are his stores and magazines of judgment against a time of trouble, and a day of battle and war. Job xxxviii. 22, 23. The hell of devils belongs to his authority. They have cast themselves out of the arms of his grace, into the furnace of his justice; they have by their revolt forfeited the treasure of his goodness, but cannot exempt themselves from the sceptre of his dominion. The

earth of men and other creatures belongs to his authority. God is king of all the earth, and rules to the ends of it. Ps. xlvii. 7.

But his dominion extends,

1. Over the least creatures. All the creatures of the earth are listed in Christ's muster-roll, and make up the number of his regiments. He hath an host on earth as well as heaven. "The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." Gen. ii. 1. And they are all his servants, Ps. cxix. 91, and move at his pleasure. And he vouchsafes the title of his army to the locust, caterpillar, and palmer worm. Joel ii. 25. And describes their motions by military words, climbing the walls, marching, not breaking their ranks. Ver. 7. He hath the command as a great general over the highest angel, and the meanest worm. Not a spot of earth, nor air, nor water, in the world, but is his possession; not a creature in any element but is his subject.

2. His dominion extends over men. It extends over the highest potentate, as well as the meanest peasant; the proudest monarch is no more exempt than the most languishing beggar. "He accepts not the persons of princes, nor regards the rich more than the poor." Job xxxiv. 19.

3. But especially this dominion, in the peculiarity of its extent, is seen in the exercise of it over the spirits and hearts of men. Earthly governors have by his indulgence a share with him in a dominion over men's bodies, upon which account he graceth princes and judges with the title of gods. Ps. lxxxii. 6. But the highest prince is but a prince according to the flesh. God is the sovereign; man rules over the beast in man, the body; and God rules over the man in man, the soul.

IV. Wherein this dominion and sovereignty consists, and how it is manifested.

1. The first act of sovereignty is the making laws. This is essential to God; no creature's will can be the first rule to the creature, but only the will of God. Hence the law is called "the royal law." James ii. 8. "The Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king." Isa. xxxiii. 22.

The dominion of God in this regard will be manifest,

1. In the supremacy of it. The sole power of making laws doth originally reside in him. "There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy." James iv. 12.

2. The dominion of God is manifest in the extent of his laws. As he is the governor and sovereign of the whole world, so he enacts laws for the whole. The heavens have their ordinances. Job xxxviii. 33. All creatures have a law imprinted on their beings; rational creatures have divine statutes copied in their hearts. Rom. ii. 15.

3. The dominion of God appears in the moral law, and his majesty in publishing it. As the law of nature was writ by his own fingers in the nature of man, so it was engraven by his own finger in the tables of stone. Ex. xxxi. 18.

4. The dominion of God appears in the obligation of the law, which reacheth the conscience. The laws of every prince are framed for the outward conditions of men. Conscience hath a protection from the King of kings, and cannot be arrested by any human power. The con-

science is intelligible to God in its secret motions, and therefore only guidable by God.

2. His sovereignty appears in a power of dispensing with his own laws. It is as much a part of his dominion to dispense with his laws, as to enjoin them. Positive laws he hath reversed; as the ceremonial law given to the Jews: the very nature of that law required a repeal, and fell off of course. Eph. ii. 15.

3. His sovereignty appears in punishing the transgression of the law.

1. This is a breach of God's dominion as lawgiver. As a lawgiver he saves or destroys. James iv. 12.

2. Punishing the transgression of his law. This is a necessary branch of dominion. "Surely there is a God that judgeth the earth." Ps. lviii. 11. He reduceth the creature by the lash of his judgments, that would not acknowledge his authority in his precepts.

3. This of punishing was the second discovery of his dominion in the world. His first act of sovereignty was the giving a law; the next, his appearance in the state of a judge.

4. The means whereby he punisheth shows his dominion. Sometimes he musters up rain and mildew, sometimes he sends regiments of wild beasts; so he threatens Israel. Lev. xxvi. 22. Sometimes he sends out a party of angels, to beat up the quarters of men, and make a carnage among them. 2 Kings xix. 35. Sometimes he mounts his thundering battery, and shoots forth his ammunition from the clouds; as against the Philistines. 1 Sam. vii. 10. Sometimes he sends the slightest creatures to shame the proud, and punish the sin of man; as lice, frogs.

5. The dominion of God is manifested as a governor as well as a lawgiver and proprietor.

1. In disposing of states and kingdoms. "God is the judge, he puts down one and sets up another." Ps. lxxv. 7. In wars, whereby flourishing kingdoms are overthrown, God hath the chief command. God is called the Lord of hosts 130 times. It is not the sword of the captain, but the sword of the Lord, bears the first rank. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Judges vii. 18. The sword of a conqueror is the sword of the Lord. "He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle." Job xii. 18.

2. The dominion of God is manifested in raising up and ordering the spirits of men according to his pleasure. He doth, as the Father of spirits, communicate an influence to the spirits of men as well as an existence. There are many examples of this part of his sovereignty. God, by his sovereign conduct, ordered Moses a protectress as soon as his parents had formed an ark of bulrushes, wherein to set him floating on the river. Ex. ii. 3—6. Thus he appointed Cyrus to be his shepherd, and gave him a pastoral spirit, for the restoration of the city and temple of Jerusalem. Isa. xlv. 28, and xlv. 5. Tells them in the prophecy that he had girded him, though Cyrus had not known him.

3. The dominion of God is manifest in restraining the furious passions of men, and putting a block in their way. Sometimes God doth it by a remarkable hand, as the Babel builders were diverted from their proud designs by a sudden confusion; sometimes by ordinary, though

unexpected means, as when Saul, like a hawk, was ready to prey upon David, whom he had hunted as a partridge upon the mountains.

4. The dominion of God is manifest in defeating the purposes and devices of men. God often makes a mock of human projects. "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty." Job v. 12. The cunningest designs baffled by some small thing intervening; when you see men of profound wisdom infatuated, mistake their way, and grope in the noon-day as in the night. Job. v. 14.

5. The dominion of God is manifest in the means and occasions of men's conversion. Sometimes one occasion, sometimes another; one word lets a man go, another arrests him, and brings him before God and his own conscience.

6. The dominion of God is manifest in disposing of the lives of men. He keeps the key of death, as well as that of the womb, in his own hand; he hath given man a life, but not power to dispose of it, nor lay it down at his pleasure.

To conclude.

1. How great is the contempt of this sovereignty of God! Man naturally would be free from God's empire, to be a slave under the dominion of his own lust. The sovereignty of God as a lawgiver is most abhorred by man. Ps. ii. 2. "Ye have set at nought all my counsel." Prov. i. 25. All sin is in its nature a contempt of the Divine dominion.

2. How dreadful is the consideration of this doctrine to all rebels against God! Punishment is unavoidable. None can escape him. He hath the sole authority over hell and death, the keys of both are in his hand.

3. What matter of comfort, and strong encouragement for prayer! "My King!" was the strong compellation David used in prayer: "hearken to the voice of my cry." Ps. v. 2. Here is comfort in afflictions. As a sovereign, he is the author of afflictions; as a sovereign, he can be the remover of them. In the severest tempest the Lord that raised the wind against us, which shattered the ship, and tore its rigging, can change that contrary wind for a more happy one, to drive us into the port. It is a comfort to the church in times of public commotions. The consideration of the divine sovereignty may arm us against the threatenings of mighty ones, and the menaces of persecutors. Prov. xxi. 30.

THE LONG-SUFFERING OF GOD.

The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward.—2 Peter iii. 9.

It is a shocking disposition of mind, which Solomon describes in that well known passage in Eccl. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Eccl. viii. 11.

It seems, at first sight, as if the wise man had rather exceeded in his portrait of the human heart.

God is patient towards all who offend him; then let us offend him without remorse, let us try the utmost extent of his patience. God lifteth over our heads a mighty hand, armed with lightnings and thunderbolts; but his hand is usually suspended awhile before it strikes: then, let us dare it while it delays; and till it moves to crush us to pieces, let us not respect it. What a disposition! What a shocking disposition of mind is this!

Could we have the madness to add sin to sin, if we were really convinced that God entertained the formidable design of bearing with us no longer?

And shall we “despise the riches of the long-suffering of God?” What! because a space to repent, shall we continue in impenitence?

“The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Pet. iii. 9.

Consider,

I. The nature of this long-suffering.

1. It is part of the Divine goodness and mercy, yet differs from both. The Lord is full of compassion, slow to anger. Long-suffering differs from mercy in respect to the object; mercy respects the creature as miserable; patience, or long-suffering, respects the creature as criminal; mercy pities him in his misery; long-suffering bears with the sin, and waits to be gracious.

Patience or long-suffering, differs also from goodness, in regard to the object. The object of goodness is every creature, from the highest angel in heaven to the meanest creature on earth. Goodness respects things in a capacity, or in a state of creation, nurseth and supporteth them as creatures; long-suffering considers them as already created and fallen short of their duty; goodness respects persons as creatures; long-suffering, as transgressors.

2. Since it is a part of goodness and mercy, it is not insensibility. He is slow to anger. The Lord considers every provocation, but is not hasty to discharge his arrows on the offenders; he sees the sin with an eye of abhorrence, but beholds the sinner with an eye of pity; his anger burns against the sin, whilst his arms are open to receive the sinner.

3. As long-suffering is a part of mercy and goodness, it is not constrained or faint-hearted patience. Patience, or long-suffering, in man, is often a feebleness of spirit, and want of strength. But it is not from the shortness of the Divine arm, that he cannot reach us, nor from the feebleness of his hand that he cannot strike us. He can soon level us with the dust, dash us in pieces like a potter's vessel, or consume us as a moth.

4. Since it is not for want of power over the creature, it is from a fulness of the power over himself. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power. As it is the effect of his power, so it is an argument of his power. As the more feeble any man is in reason, the less command he hath over his passions. Revenge is a sign of a childish mind. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty. The long-suffering of God towards sinners, manifests his power more than the creation of a world.

5. As long-suffering is a branch of mercy, the exercise of it is founded

on the death of Christ. It is in Christ we find the satisfaction of justice; and it is in and through Christ the long-suffering of God is manifested to man.

II. How this long-suffering or patience is manifested.

1. To our first parents. The patience or long-suffering of God was manifested in not directing his artillery against them, when they first attempted to rebel. He might have struck them dead, when they began to hearken to the tempter. And after our first parent had brought his sin to perfection, God did not immediately send that death on him, which he had merited, but continued his life to the space of 930 years.

2. His long-suffering is manifest to the gentiles. What they were, we need no other witness than the apostle, who sums up many of their crimes; "being filled with all unrighteousness." Rom. i. 29—32. And he concludes with these dreadful aggravations, "they not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." They were so naturalized in wickedness, that they delighted in nothing else. They were plunged into idolatry and superstition. Yet did the Lord appear against them with fire and sword? "At the times of that ignorance he winked." Acts xvii. 30.

3. The long-suffering of God was manifested to the Israelites. He suffered their manners forty years in the wilderness. He bore with that people above 1500 years, from their coming out of Egypt to the destruction of their commonwealth.

In particular this long-suffering of God is manifested,

1. In his giving warning of judgments before they are commissioned to go forth. The Lord speaks before he strikes, and speaks that he may not strike. Wrath is published before it is executed, and that a long time; the old world were warned 120 years before the deluge came on them.

The Lord does not come unawares. I will chastise them as their congregation hath heard. The Lord summoned by the voice of his prophets, before he confounded by the voice of his thunders. He seldom cuts men down by his judgments, before he hath hewed them by his prophets. Not a remarkable judgment but was foretold; the flood, by Noah; the famine to Egypt, by Joseph; the earthquake, by Amos; Amos i. 1; the storm from Chaldea, by Jeremiah; the captivity of the ten tribes, by Hosea; and the total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, by Christ. And he thus warns, that men may take the warning, and thunders again and again, before he crushes with his thunderbolt.

2. The long-suffering of the Lord is manifested in his unwillingness to execute his threatened judgments, when he can delay no longer. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. He takes no pleasure in it. When he came to reckon with Adam, he walked, he did not run with his sword, and that in the cool of the day. His exercising of judgment, is a coming out of his place. Isa. xxvi. 21. Micah i. 3. Hence every prophecy loaded with a threatening, is called the burden of the Lord. When the Lord punishes, he doth it with some regret; when he hurls down his thunders, he seems to do it with a backward hand. "He created," saith Chrysostom, "the world in six days, but was seven days in destroying one city, Jericho." When the Lord

strikes, it is with a sigh. "Ah! I will ease me of my adversaries, and avenge me of my enemies." Isa. i. 24. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim!" "And many a time," says the Psalmist, "turned he his anger away."

3. His long-suffering is manifested, in that when he begins to send out his judgments, he doth it by degrees. His judgments are as the morning light. He doth not thunder all his judgments at once. First the palmer worm, then the locust, then the canker-worm, then the caterpillar, Joel i. 4. A Jewish writer says, these came not all in one year, but one year after another.

4. His long-suffering appears, by moderating his judgments. He stirreth not up all his wrath. He doth not empty his quivers, nor exhaust his magazines of thunder. "He rewardeth us not according to our iniquities." Ps. ciii. 10.

5. His long-suffering further appears, in giving great mercies after provocations. He is so slow to anger, that he heaps many kindnesses on a rebel; instead of punishment, there is prosperous wickedness. Israel quarrelled with his servant Moses at the Red Sea; yet then the Lord stretched forth his hand and delivered them.

The long-suffering of God appears also when we consider the greatness and multitude of our provocations. Men drinking in iniquity like water; rushing into sin. The imaginations of the thoughts of the heart only evil.

III. The ground and reason of this long-suffering to us-ward.

1. As a testimony of his reconcilable and merciful nature towards sinners. "Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering." 1 Tim. i. 16.

2. That sinners may be brought to repentance. "Not knowing," says the apostle, "that the riches of his forbearance and goodness leads thee to repentance." Rom. ii. 4. The Lord is long-suffering to us-ward. "The long-suffering of God is salvation," 2 Pet. iii. 15, *i. e.* hath a tendency to salvation.

3. For the continuance of his church. "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it." Isa. lxxv. 8, 9.

4. That his justice may be clear when he condemns the impenitent. "I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not." Rev. ii. 21.

5. In answer to the prayers of his people, his long-suffering is exercised towards sinners. "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom." Isa. i. 9.

To conclude.

1. How is the long-suffering of God abused! May we not say to the Lord, as Saul said to David, "Thou art more righteous than I, thou hast rewarded me with good?" 1 Sam. xxiv. 17.

2. Is the Lord long-suffering? How much better, therefore, is it to fall into the hands of God, than into the hands of men—the best of men! Moses, a meek man, once cried, "Ye rebels!"

3. We may infer from the Lord's long-suffering towards sinners, the value of the soul: he not only died to redeem it, but waits with unwearied

patience and forbearance to receive it. "Behold, I stand at the door." Rev. iii. 20.

Lastly. If the Lord be thus long-suffering to us-ward, who have so long and repeatedly rebelled against him, ought not Christians to exercise forbearance and long-suffering one towards another? "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering." Eph. iv. 1—6.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

BY THE LIGHT OF NATURE.

The living God, which made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein, &c.—Acts xiv. 15—17.

WHEN the apostle Paul gave authority to his ministrations at Lystra, by working a miraculous cure on a man who was born a cripple, the inhabitants imagined that he and Barnabas were gods, and were immediately preparing a sacrifice for them: but to divert this madness and superstition of paying divine homage to the creatures, the apostles, with holy jealousy and indignation, ran into the midst of them, and preached to them the living and the true God. "We," they say, "are utterly unworthy of these divine honors; for we are men of such flesh and blood as yourselves, and are liable to the like infirmities: we preach to you, that ye should turn from these vanities to the living God who made heaven and earth," &c.

From these words we may raise the following observations:

I. The light of nature may teach us, that there is one Supreme Being.

He hath not left himself without witness. The Being which made all things, or the First Cause of all. And when I say, God may be known by the light of nature, I mean, that the senses and the reasoning powers, which belong to the nature of man, are able to give him so much light in seeking after God, as to find out something of him thereby, or to gain some knowledge of him. "That which may be known of God is manifested." Rom. i. 19, 20.

1. By the light of nature we may come to the knowledge of his existence. It is evident, that no thing could make itself. It is impossible that any thing which once had no being should ever give being to itself. Since, therefore, there is a world with millions of beings in it, which are born and die, it is certain there is some Being who had no beginning. This is the being whom we call God.

Of all the visible beings that we are acquainted with, man is the highest and most noble; but he is forced to confess he is not his maker. Our parents, or our ancestors, were no more able to make themselves than we are.

Or, if some atheist should say, "We must run up from son to father, and from father to grandfather, in endless generations, without a beginning, and without any first cause." This is impossible; for if ten

thousand generations cannot subsist of themselves without dependence on something before them, neither endless generations. Suppose a chain of ten thousand links hung down from the sky, and could not support itself, unless some mighty power upheld the first link; then it is certain, a chain of ten thousand times ten thousand links, or an endless chain, could never support itself. There must be, therefore, some first bird, some first beast, some first man.

2. What God is, viz. that he is a Spirit, perfect in wisdom, and perfect in power. The amazing work of God in the heavens, the sun, the moon, the stars, their regular and unerring motions, for so many thousand years; the progress of the hours, the changes of day and night, winter and summer, which depend on these motions and revolutions: they all abundantly discover that the maker of them was wise and skillful beyond all our conceptions. If we observe the operations of a clock or watch, which doth but imitate the motions of these heavenly bodies, and point out to us the day and the hour, we say it is impossible this curious engine could be made without great wisdom and skill in some artificer who contrived it; and can we be so foolish as to imagine that this vast and glorious engine of the heavens, with all its bright furniture, which makes times and seasons, day and night, could ever come into being by chance?

The wonderful production of plants, herbs, trees, and flowers, and astonishing operations of living creatures, and their several parts and powers, discover to us the deep wisdom and knowledge of the Being that made them. Let us consider but our own natures, our parts and powers; what wonders are contained in every sense! Can all these be formed without infinite wisdom? I might demand of the sons of atheism, in the language of the Psalmist, "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?" Ps. xciv. 9, 10. And as the wonders of contrivance in the works of God declare his depth of wisdom, so the difficulty of creating them out of nothing argues his almighty power. "When we survey the heavens, the work of his hands," what a glorious and powerful being must that be, which formed these vast bodies at first, and which upholds their stupendous frame! Man can only change the shapes and qualities of things: he can make a clock, but he must have brass and iron given him, for he cannot create these materials: but God's huge and astonishing engine of the heavens, whereby hours and days, seasons and ages, are made and measured out, were all formed by him without any materials: he made all the materials himself. A creator must be almighty, he must be God.

Again, let us think within ourselves, what a powerful being must that be, who can make a soul, a spirit, a thinking being to exist, so nearly like himself, with an understanding capable of knowing the works of God, and of knowing God himself? We are his image, "we are his offspring." Acts xvii. 28, 29. Thus sang Aratus, the heathen poet, and spoke like a Christian.

And thus it appears beyond all controversy, that the light of nature finds there is a God, and that this God is an all-wise and almighty spirit. If we were in doubt about his existence or being, these reasonings would assure us of it; and if we seek after his nature and his perfections, these his works discover them.

3. His supreme and absolute dominion over all things, that God is the sovereign lord and possessor of heaven and earth, Gen. xiv. 19, and consequently that he hath a right to dispose of all things as he pleases. "Who therefore shall say to him, What dost thou?" Rom. ix. 20.

4. That though God be the absolute and natural lord of all things that he hath made, yet he is pleased to deal with his rational creatures in a way of moral government. The conscience which he hath formed in man, may discover in him so much of the natural law and will of his God, as a righteous governor of the world, if it be properly and wisely employed. "The gentiles which have not the written law," Rom. ii. 14, 15, which not only teaches them that adoration and worship, prayer, and praise, are duties which they owe to God; but it instructs them also to distinguish between vice and virtue. "Surely this man is a murderer." Acts xxviii. 4.

Reason and conscience might teach mankind that since God has given them an understanding and freedom of will to choose or refuse good or evil, he will certainly call them to account for their behaviour. In their own consciences there is a kind of tribunal erected, "their conscience excusing or accusing them." Rom. ii. 15.

5. That God is an universal benefactor to mankind, even above and beyond their deserts, and notwithstanding all their provocations. That though they walked in their own idolatrous ways, yet God left them not without witness of his goodness, giving them fruitful seasons.

II. What are the various uses of this knowledge of God which is attainable by the light of nature?

In general, it is to bear witness for God in the world. More particularly,

1. This knowledge of God, as our maker and governor, by the light of nature, is useful, not only to show men their duty, but to convince them of sin. The apostle Paul begins with this doctrine in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, where his great design is to show mankind the guilt and wretchedness of their state.

2. As it is designed to awaken men to the practice of their duty. This natural conscience is the candle of their Lord, which he has set up in the heart of man; and though it shines but dimly, yet it has sometimes kept them from being more vile.

3. Gives some encouragement to guilty creatures to repent of their sins, and to return to God by a general hope of acceptance, though they had no promise of pardoning grace. And this was the very principle on which some of the gentiles set themselves to practise virtue, to worship God and endeavour to become like him. I do not say, that natural religion can give sinful men a full and satisfying assurance of pardon on their repentance; for the deepest degrees of penitence cannot oblige a prince to forgive the criminal: but still his overflowing goodness may evidently and justly excite in their hearts some hope of forgiving grace. The Ninevites themselves, when threatened with destruction, "repented in sackcloth and ashes." Jonah iii. 5—10. And there is yet a more express text to this purpose: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness?" Rom. ii. 4.

4. Serves to vindicate the conduct of God as a righteous governor. This will leave them without excuse in "the great day, when God shall judge the secrets of all hearts." Rom. ii. 15, 16. Their own consciences will accuse them. "Is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance on such sinners? God forbid." Rom. iii. 5, 6. In the world to come, not one condemned sinner shall be able to say, God is unjust. "Every mouth shall be stopped," Rom. iii. 19, and the heavens and the earth proclaim his righteousness.

5. Prepares the way for preaching and receiving the gospel of his grace; and that many ways.

We see the apostle wisely managing his ministry to the Athenians, of which we have but short hints in Acts xvii. 22, &c. By discoursing first on natural religion, and agreeably to this method of propagating the gospel among the heathen nations, we find, in fact, that where there was any thing of the knowledge of the true God, either by the light of nature, or by tradition, there the gospel was soonest received.

III. The defects or imperfections of it.

1. It is but a small portion of the things of God, which the bulk of mankind can generally be supposed to learn merely by their own reasonings. This is sufficiently evident by the history of past times and ancient nations, as well as by present observation of the heathen world. Though some of the philosophers attained considerable knowledge of the nature of God, and clearly saw "his eternal power and godhead," Rom. i. 20, yet these were but very few in comparison of the rest.

2. It is but dim and feeble, and leaves mankind under many doubts and uncertainties in matters of importance. A short lesson of knowledge in the heathen schools was obtained with long toil and difficulty: their philosophy was rather a feeling after God in the dark, than a sight of him in day-light: so the apostle expresses himself, "that they should seek the Lord." Acts xvii. 27. What feeble words are these! how doubtful a knowledge is represented by them! how generally, and almost without exception, did their philosophers comply with the idolatry of their country, and "worship God in the form of beasts and birds." Jer. viii. 2.

In some countries, the youth and flower of conquered nations were doomed a sacrifice to their idols; and sometimes filthy and abominable lewdness were the ceremonies of their worship. How blind was the eye of their reason, not to see this madness! and how feeble its power, that it made no remonstrances against these lewd and bloody scenes of degenerated piety!

All these instances indeed do not effectually prove, that reason could not possibly teach them better; but the experience of long ages and of whole nations sufficiently shows us, that their reason neither did inform them better, nor was ever likely to do it. "The world by wisdom knew not God." 1 Cor. i. 21.

3. All the knowledge of God which they arrived at, by the light of nature, had actually but little influence to reform the hearts or the lives of mankind. I say, it had but little influence in comparison of what it might or should have had. Acts xiv. 16. Rom. i.

4. It doth rather serve to show men their sin and misery, than disco-

ver any effectual relief; and in this respect it comes infinitely short of what the revelation of the gospel of Christ hath done.

1. The light of nature of itself gives no assurance of forgiveness to the repenting sinner. "Who can tell but the Lord may turn away from his fierce anger?" Deut. xiii. 17, is but a feeble motive to repentance and new obedience, in comparison of such a word from God himself, as "and the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." Ex. xxxiv. 6. "He that confesseth and forsaketh." Prov. xxviii. 13.

2. The light of nature discovers no effectual atonement for sin, nor relief to a guilty conscience, by all the costly sacrifice and blood of animals; but the gospel points us to the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world," John i. 29, and assures us that "if we confess our sins." 1 John i. 6.

3. The light of nature points us to no effectual mediator, or advocate in heaven; but the gospel leads us to "Jesus the righteous, as our advocate with the Father." 1 John ii. 1, 2.

4. The light of nature and our daily experience discover to us our weakness to subdue sin within us, to restrain our unruly appetites, to mortify our corrupt affections, to resist the daily temptations that surround us; but it points us not to the fountain of strength, even the promised aids of the Holy Spirit: these are the peculiar glories and blessings of the gospel of Christ.

5. The light of nature and continual observation show us, that we must die, but give us no clear and certain evidence of happiness after death. But the gospel sets these future glories in a divine and certain light before every man who reads or hears it. It encourages us to repentance of sin, to diligence, patience, and perseverance in the ways of faith and holiness, by the joys unspeakable which are set before us, and builds our hope of eternal life on the well-attested promises of a God who cannot lie.

Reflections.

1. Since the rational knowledge of God and natural religion had its proper uses, and especially to lay a foundation for our receiving the gospel of Christ, let it not be despised nor abandoned by any of us. There may be some necessary occasions for our recourse to it. St. Paul made glorious use of it in his discourse with the Athenian infidels.

2. Since this knowledge of God, which is attainable by the light of nature, has so many defects, let us never venture to rest in it. Dare not content yourselves with the lessons of the book of nature. The sun in the firmament, with the moon and all the stars, can never give that light to see God, which is derived from the Sun of Righteousness.

What a deplorable thing is it, that multitudes in our nation, where the glory of the blessed gospel shines with such brightness, should be running back to the glimmering light of nature, and satisfy themselves with heathenism and philosophy! that they should choose to walk in twilight, and refuse to be conducted by the blaze of noon! "The god of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not." 2 Cor. iv. 4.

3. Since the nations, which have only the light of nature, are forced to feel out their way to God through such dusky glimmerings, let us

bless the Lord with all our souls, that we are born in a land of clear light, where the gospel shines in all its beauty. How should we value the Bible as our highest treasure, which gives us such blessed discoveries of God and his wisdom and power, and his mercy in Christ, which infinitely exceed all the doubtful twilight of nature ! Oh, may the blessed Bible lie next our hearts, and be the companion of our bosoms !

4. Pity and pray for the heathen world, the dark corners of the earth, the benighted nations, where the Sun of Righteousness never rose, and where they can but feel after God through the mists of ignorance and error. Let us remember these ancient times, when our forefathers in this nation were led away into the same errors and gross idolatries, and lift up one compassionate groan to heaven for them. When shall the ends of the earth learn to know thee ? When shall all nations, people, and languages, begin their songs of salvation to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb ?

THE

DIVINE AUTHORITY AND PERFECTION

OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness.—
2 Tim. iii. 16.

THERE are but two possible ways of acquiring the knowledge of the mind of God, and these are *reason* and *revelation*: reason is that noble faculty of the soul by which man is distinguished from all inferior orders of creatures, and made capable of moral government. When our first parents were in a state of innocence, this alone was sufficient to acquaint them with every part of their duty ; but upon their disobedience it was so far eclipsed, that from this time, the world with all its wisdom, has neither been fully acquainted with the perfections of the true God, nor with the right and acceptable manner of worshipping him ; as appears from the history of those ages and nations which have not had the advantage of revelation. The apostle Paul, speaking of the gentile world, says, “ they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man.” Rom. i. 26, &c. He admits they had some little acquaintance with God, but not sufficient to direct their practice ; for even at Athens, the most learned city of Greece, there was an altar with this inscription, “ To the unknown God.” Acts xvii. 23. If we look abroad into the barbarous nations at this day, we shall find them buried in ignorance and superstition. How little do they know of the nature and perfections of the one living and true God, and of his reasonable service ! and how dim are the remains of natural light, with regard to the terms of acceptance with him ! all which demonstrate the necessity and usefulness of a Divine revelation, or of that clear and bright discovery of his will contained in the Scriptures of the

Old and the New Testament ; which, according to the apostle, are given by the inspiration of God, and are profitable for doctrine.

I. The scriptures of the Old and New Testament are given by inspiration of God.

By the scriptures, the apostle, in our text, means chiefly the Old Testament, for the canon of the New was not yet finished ; and by their being inspired, that those ancient prophecies came not by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

In order to judge whether persons are inspired, we must,

1. Inquire into their moral character: Are they virtuous and holy persons? These dare not deceive, nor deliver any thing as a revelation from God, but what they are fully satisfied they have received from him. If a pretender to inspiration should denounce some remarkable judgment to be inflicted for our vile crimes, and should himself be notoriously guilty of those vices, it is not reasonable to suppose we should receive him as a prophet sent from God.

2. We must examine into their doctrine. Is the doctrine they teach according to godliness? A divine revelation must have a tendency to promote divine knowledge and virtue, not only by teaching men to deny ungodliness, but also to live soberly and righteously. Again, do they exalt the Divine glory and majesty, and abase the creature so far, as that no flesh should glory in his sight?

3. We must consider the credentials, or external proofs, of their mission ; which are principally,

1. Miracles. There can be no stronger evidence of a divine mission than this. When Moses was sent with a message to Pharaoh, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh shall speak to you, saying, Show a miracle, then take your rod." Ex. vii. 9. By which it appears, that in those early times miracles were esteemed a convincing proof of a divine mission. Our Lord appeals, upon all occasions, to his miracles. When John the Baptist sent to inquire of him, "whether he was the Christ?" he replies, "Go tell your master, that the blind receive their sight." Matt. xi. 5. How often did he point the scribes and pharisees to his mighty works, as well as his disciples! "Believe me that I am in the Father." John xiv. 11.

2. Fulfilment of prophecy. No mere man can foretell what shall be on the morrow, much less in ages far remote. This is the sole prerogative of the great God; as he alone searches and tries the reins and the heart, so he only can foretell the end from the beginning. "When therefore a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord." Deut. xviii. 22.

Now, all these marks and characters of inspiration are nowhere so conspicuous as in the holy scriptures. Moses, David, Solomon, Daniel, and the rest of the prophets, were pious and upright men ; and it is no inconsiderable proof of their integrity, that they have left their own faults and infirmities on record. Their doctrines are reasonable, just, and good, tending to promote the glory of God and the happiness of man. What sublime strains of devotion are in the Psalms of David ! what excellent rules for the conduct of life in the writings of Solomon ! and how glorious does the God of Israel shine throughout all the prophets ! how kind and gracious are his promises ! how awful his threate-

nings! and how wonderfully is his majesty supported by the numerous representations of the infinite distance and disproportion between him and his creatures! These holy men believed themselves inspired, for they tell us the word of the Lord came unto them at such a time; and when they spake, it is with, "Thus saith the Lord."

And with regard to the New Testament, the evidence of its divine authority is as strong as the nature of things will admit. The apostle tells us, that "God, who, at sundry times and in divers manners." Heb. i. 1. So that if Jesus Christ be the Son of God, it will certainly follow, that his doctrine could be no other than a divine revelation. And this appears in many prophecies of the Old Testament. It was prophesied of the Messiah, "that he should be incarnate before the sceptre departed from Judah; that he should be born of a virgin, that he should be of the seed of David, and of the tribe of Judah; that the place of his nativity should be Bethlehem, a village of Judea; that his name should be Immanuel; that he should appear in the form of a servant, and, after a mean and contemptible life, should be betrayed by one of his own household, and cut off for the sins of the people." It was therefore with the highest reason that our Saviour upbraided his countrymen for their unbelief. "O fools, and slow of heart." Luke xxiv. 25, 26.

Besides, how illustriously do the other characters of inspiration, already mentioned, shine forth in the person of Christ, who was holy, harmless, undefiled; whose doctrines were so rational and sublime, that the people wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth! The miracles which he wrought in confirmation of his doctrine were so clear and surprising, that nothing but the extremest obstinacy and malice could withstand their evidence. But as there were many doctrines necessary to be known, which the apostles of our blessed Saviour could not receive from him in his state of humiliation and suffering; he therefore promised, after his ascension into heaven, to inspire them with the extraordinary gift of the Holy Spirit, whereby they should be led into all truth, and qualified to declare to the Gentiles "the whole counsel of God." Accordingly on the day of Pentecost, when the apostles were gathered together in one place, "The Holy Ghost came upon them, and enabled them not only to speak divers languages, but to confirm the doctrines they taught with signs and wonders." Heb. ii. 4.

II. The perfection or sufficiency of the scriptures.

It is said in the preceding verse, "that they are able to make us wise to salvation;" and in the text, that they "are profitable for doctrine, for reproof." By the sufficiency of the holy scriptures, we mean, that they contain all things necessary to be believed and practised; the law of Moses was so complete a direction of the faith and obedience of the Jews, that the additions of the scribes and pharisees were both useless and vain. Matt. xv. 6, 9. In like manner the writings of the New Testament are a perfect standard to us Christians; for all things that our blessed Lord heard of his Father, he made known to his apostles, and the apostles to the churches. "I take you to record." Acts xx. 26, 27.

But the perfection of the holy scriptures may be further illustrated from the particulars in my text, as,

1. They are profitable for doctrine ; to acquaint us with our lost and miserable condition by sin, and the train of fatal consequences that attend it, with our recovery by Christ, the covenants of redemption and grace, the offices of Father, Son, and Spirit, in the work of our redemption, and with all those "other mysteries which were kept secret since the world began." Rom. xvi. 25.

2. For reproof; or the discovery of our pernicious errors in doctrine and practice. When the gospel was first preached among the idolatrous nations, their dumb idols were thrown down, and their superstitious vanities fled before it, as the shadows of the night before the rising sun. The scriptures are now the standard of truth; and if men preach not agreeably thereto, it is because there is no light in them. A text of scripture rightly explained and applied, is as full a confutation of error to a Christian, as a mathematical demonstration to a philosopher.

3. The scriptures are profitable for correction of vice and wickedness: "Wherewithal," says the Psalmist, "should a young man cleanse his way?" Ps. cxix. 9. There we have a collection of all Christian graces and duties, with their opposite vices: the fruits of the Spirit, and of the flesh, are distinguished with the greatest propriety; and the most engaging motives to the practice of the one, and awful threatenings against the other, are represented with the greatest strength and advantage.

4. For instruction in righteousness; that is, either in the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all that believe; or in the practice of moral righteousness, the nature and excellency of which is better explained and illustrated in the sermons of our blessed Saviour, than in all the writings of the ancient philosophers.

The precepts of the Bible are so many excellent rules for holy life, and the promises are divine encouragements to it: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved." 2 Cor. vii. 1. In a word, the holy scriptures are sufficient for all the purposes of religion.

III. Their clearness and perspicuity.

There are sublime speculations, which may employ the thoughts of the most learned inquirer after truth; as well as the deep things of God, which the angels are desirous to look into: and there are also the principles of the doctrine of Christ; that is, the "milk of the word," 1 Pet. ii. 2, or the softest and gentlest food which is fit for babes, as the other is for strong men. The doctrines of the greatest consequence, such as repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the certainty of a future state, of the resurrection of the dead, and of judgment to come, are most clearly revealed. The love of God and of our neighbour; together with the necessity of universal holiness, charity, and good works, run through the whole of the New Testament, and are placed in so strong a light, that persons of the meanest capacities cannot but understand them. Besides,

1. The holy scriptures were written in the vulgar language, and therefore designed for the use of the common people. The Old Testament was written in the language of the Jewish nation, and a portion of it read in their synagogues every Sabbath-day. The New Testament was written in Greek, which was, at that time, the general language; and

St. Paul's Epistles were read in the churches. Now can we suppose that the scriptures should be read to the common people, and they not capable to understand them? Could not the Spirit of God write clearly? or would he not? To say the former is blasphemy, and to affirm the latter, is in effect to say, the scriptures are no revelation to the churches: for if they cannot understand them after their best inquiries, they might almost as well have been without them.

2. Our Saviour, in his sermons to the people, appeals to the scriptures, and exhorts his countrymen the Jews to search them. "Search the scriptures." John v. 39. The noble Bereans are commended for this practice, and young Timothy appears to have been acquainted with them from his childhood. Acts xvii. 11.

Remark,

1. Hence we may learn, that the religion of a Christian should be his Bible; because it contains the whole revealed will of God, and is a perfect rule of faith and practice. It is also a more sure word of prophecy.

2. Let us be thankful that we have the scriptures in the vulgar language. Christianity was professed a thousand years in this island before the Bible was translated into English. This was one of the peculiar blessings of the Reformation.

3. Let us revive this neglected duty of reading the scriptures. It is both a delightful and useful employment. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning." Rom. xv. 4. It was enjoined the Israelites, upon their coming out of Egypt into the land of Canaan, that they should not only love the Lord their God, but "the words which I command thee this day." Deut. vi. 5—7.

4. When we read the scriptures, let us consider them not as the words of men, but as in deed and truth the word of God. If some things are above our capacities, let us remember, "that the foolishness of God is wiser than men." 1 Cor. i. 25. Let us read the scriptures therefore with reverence, and endeavour to understand them, as well as we can, by comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

5. In judging of controversies among Christians, let us not be carried away by the authority of great names or numbers. Councils, and fathers, and synods, may be mistaken in their decrees; but the word of God is infallible. Here we are safe, and nowhere else.

6. When we read the scriptures, let us pray for the instructions and teachings of the Holy Spirit: for it is not sufficient, that the light of the gospel shines around us, unless the Spirit of God, who once commanded light to shine out of darkness, shines in our hearts. "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures." Luke xxiv. 45. "Lord, open our eyes, that we may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Ps. cxix. 18.

ON THE

PERFECTION OF THE SCRIPTURES.

But thy commandment is exceeding broad.—Ps. cxix. 96.

By commandment, the Psalmist here means the whole will, word, and law of God, as it is contained in the holy scriptures. And I intend from these words to discourse concerning the fulness, perfection, and sufficiency of that word and law.

I. The perfection of the holy scriptures will appear, if we consider them with respect to their author and original.

This word the Almighty God has spoken; this law, or this commandment, the infinite Jehovah has made and given. As the child bears the image of the parent, and the wax receives the impression of the seal, so these sacred oracles breathe forth the spirit of their great Author; and do in every page confess the likeness which they have to their Divine original.

The unparalleled excellences of the Divine nature, the glories of the supreme Majesty, are here expressed, as the features of a man's face are visible in the glass wherein he looks.

These scriptures are not of a common birth: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God;" 2 Tim. iii. 16, and "holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Pet. i. 21.

Now there is, in the word and law of God, a perfection of holiness and purity; of truth and certainty; of righteousness and justice; of wisdom and knowledge; of mercy and goodness; of perpetuity and duration. Ps. xix. 7—9.

II. If we consider the subject matter.

It is said of the authority, excellency, and perfection of our Lord's doctrine, that "never man spake like this man." The gospel contains the words which our Lord spake: of which our Lord gives the truest and fairest description, when he says, "The words which I speak, they are spirit, and they are life." John vi. 63. There is that spirit of heavenly light, life, and love; there is that divine virtue, and that exquisite beauty, in these sacred writings, that no other composure can parallel.

Here we have the nature of God discovered, the lines of sovereign power and wisdom drawn in the clearest brightness. Much of God may be read in his creatures; "the invisible things of him." Rom. i. 20.

But the most complete and attractive attributes of God are nowhere so amply displayed, as in this revelation he has made of himself in his word: from this book do the brightest beams of divine love break out upon us in the most astonishing manner. The perfection of the scriptures will appear, if we consider the usefulness of the histories, the certainty of the prophecies, the wisdom of the laws, the sanctity of the morals, the loftiness of the mysteries, the brightness of the examples, the preciousness of the promises on the one hand, and the terror of the judgments on the other.

Here are contained the deep things of God, the unfathomable secrets

of infinite wisdom. Here we have discovered to us the adorable mystery of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, the fall of man, and the corruption of our nature by it, the various windings of providence, concerning which we have reason to break out with astonishment, "O the depth!" Rom. xi. 33.

How important are the discoveries of a future state of inexpressible rewards and punishments, of the solemn and august appearance of the last and great day! How admirable are the rules of life, how strict the precepts of virtue! What a complete treatise of practical religion have we given to us in our Saviour's sermon on the mount! There are such bright images of piety, such refined rules of holy living, such as by far outdo all the former institutions of religion and philosophy. They never taught the duty of loving our enemies, mortifying our anger, abstaining from revenge, the necessity of forgiving injuries. These are some of the peculiar perfections and excellencies which belong to the laws of Christ.

III. The next instance wherein the perfection of the scriptures consists, is the manner in which they are written.

In the word of God there is not only a profound treasure of the most excellent matter, but those holy and heavenly truths are also delivered in the most majestic strains of oratory, and with all the ornaments of the most exalted rhetoric. Words are nowhere arranged in a more attractive order, nor do the triumphs of sacred eloquence shine in any author with greater splendour, nor flow with an everer stream. How wonderful and surprising are the descriptions which Job (in chaps. xxxvii. xxxviii. and xxxix.) gives of the divine power and providence! In how fine and poetical a strain are the songs of Moses and Deborah composed! And with how much beauty of style, as well as height of devotion, is the book of the Psalms replenished! How lofty and intricate are some of the Prophets! How pathetic and terrible are others! and some, again, how mild and gentle! What refined wisdom, what deep experience, what admirable observations of human policy, have we in the writings of Solomon! What noble characters, and lively images of things, have we dispersed in those instructive pages! How inimitably is the passion of grief set forth in the Lamentations of Jeremiah!

"One would think," says Dr. South, "that every letter was written with a tear, every word was the sad accent of a breaking heart; that the penman was a man compacted of sorrows, and disciplined to mourning; that he never breathed but in sighs, nor spoke but in a groan."

How awful and dreadful is the account which Moses gives us of the publication of the law! God descended in fire and smoke, and the people did not only fear, but the hill shook, and the mountain did exceedingly quake and tremble. Nothing can give us a juster idea of omnipotent power, than that expression of Moses, when God says, "Let there be light: and there was light." "He spake the word, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." Gen. i. 3. Ps. xxxiii. 9.

How exactly, and with how much harmony, have the Evangelists written of the life and passion of our Saviour! How strongly do the mysteries of divine grace and goodness flow in the Epistles! What a glorious description have we of the New Jerusalem! Rev. xxi. 23. In-

deed, none can describe the excellency and dignity of the whole composition of the New Testament.

IV. The excellency of the scriptures will appear, if we consider the design for which they are revealed.

The intent of their promulgation is glorious. There is no book in the world that is so adapted for the raising our minds, refining our judgments, spiritualizing our affections, and advancing our hearts to the imitation of God.

One great end of this inspired book is, to direct us to the knowledge of God, his being, nature, and attributes. God hath made himself known by his works; but he has done this more perfectly by his word. In the one he hath shown his back-parts, as once he did to Moses; but in this, he has uncovered his face.

Another end of the holy scriptures is, to lead us into the knowledge of the providence of God; his various dealings with his church and people in all ages; how he has protected them by his power, corrected them by his judgments, comforted them by his Spirit, ruled them by his laws.

To make us complete and universal in our obedience, that the uprightness, which we lost by the fall, may be repaired and restored by the Spirit of grace.

To give us a true and just notion of ourselves, to abate our pride, to show us what we are, and from whom we have received our all.

To give us right thoughts concerning the world, the vanity and uncertainty of every creature.

They do in the best manner direct us to our great end, the glory of God, and the salvation of our souls. In all which particulars we must say of the law of God,

“Thy commandment is exceeding broad,” Ps. cxix. 96. *i. e.* it is exceeding perfect, wanting nothing, either to declare the greatness of its author, or to contribute to the happiness of man.

Observe,

If the scriptures are thus excellent and perfect, in their original composition and design; if we have in them so great and so worthy a rule and direction of life and manners; then from hence it will follow, that we cannot employ our time better than in searching this rule, than in reading and studying the scriptures, which are written for our learning, and which are so exceedingly useful and profitable to us in every respect. Let us search, and diligently meditate on these sacred writings; and, since, “we have so sure a word of prophecy, we should do well to take heed unto it.” 2 Pet. i. 19.

ON THE EXCELLENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

We have also a more sure word of prophecy, &c.—2 Peter i. 19.

THE large volume of the creation, wherein God hath described so much of his wisdom and power, is yet too dark and imperfect to set forth to us the way which leads to eternal happiness, unless the same God, which made men's souls at first, do show them the way for their recovery; as they are in a degenerate, so they will be in a desperate condition; but the same bounty and goodness of God, which did at first display itself in giving being to men's souls, hath in a higher manner enlarged the discovery of itself, by making known the way whereby we may be taken into his grace and favour. Now that incomparable excellency, which is in the sacred scriptures, will fully appear, if we consider,

I. The matters which are revealed in scripture are of the greatest moment and importance for men to know.

1. What is there which it doth more highly concern men to know than God himself? or what more glorious and excellent object could he discover than himself to the world? There is nothing certainly which should more commend the scriptures to us, than that thereby we may grow more acquainted with God. We may there see and understand the great wisdom of God, not only in the contrivance of the world, and ordering of it, but in the gradual revelations of himself to his people; by what steps he trained up his church till the fulness of the time was come; what his aim was in laying such a load of ceremonies on his people, the Jews; by what steps and degrees he made way for the full revelation of his will to the world, by speaking in these last days by his Son, after he had spoken at sundry times and divers manners by the prophets, &c. unto the fathers. In the scriptures we read the most rich and admirable discoveries of divine goodness, with what majesty he commands, with what condescension he intreats, with what importunity he woos men's souls to be reconciled to him, with what favour he embraceth, with what tenderness he chastiseth, with what bowels he pitieth, those who have chosen him to be their God! With what power he supporteth, with what wisdom he directeth, with what cordials he refresheth the souls of such who are dejected under the sense of his displeasure, and yet their love is sincere towards him! With what profound humility, what holy boldness, what becoming distance, and yet what restless importunity, do we herein find the souls of God's people addressing themselves to him in prayer! With what cheerfulness do they serve him, with what confidence do they trust in him, with what resolution do they adhere to him in all straits and difficulties, with what patience do they submit to his will in their greatest extremities! How fearful are they of sinning against God, how careful to please him, how regardless of suffering, when they must choose either that or sinning; how little apprehensive of men's displeasure! But, above all other discoveries of God's goodness, his sending his Son into the world to die for sinners, is that which the scripture sets forth with the greatest life and

eloquence. And what can tend more to melt our frozen hearts into a current of thankful obedience to God, than the vigorous reflection of the beams of God's love through Jesus Christ? Was there ever so great an expression of love heard of? Well might the apostles say, "this is a faithful saying," 1 Tim. i. 15, and "that he determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified." Christ crucified is the library which triumphant souls will be studying to all eternity. 1 Cor. ii. 2.

And is not this an inestimable benefit we enjoy by the scriptures, that therein we can read and converse with all these expressions of God's love and goodness, and that in his own language? Shall we admire and praise what we meet with in heathen philosophers, which is generous and handsome; and shall we not adore the infinite fulness of the scriptures? And as the goodness of God is thus discovered in scripture, so is his justice and holiness: we have therein recorded the most remarkable judgments of God upon contumacious sinners, the severest denunciations of a judgment to come against all that live in sin, the exactest precepts of holiness in the world: we have the greatest cause to admire the excellency, and adore the fulness of the scriptures, which give us so large, rational, and complete account of the being and attributes of God. It is thence necessary that God should make himself known to the world, to prevent our misconceptions of his nature; and to assure a suspicious, because guilty creature, how ready he is to pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin, to such as unfeignedly repent. Though the light of nature may dictate much to us of the benignity and goodness of the Divine nature, yet it is hard to conceive that that should discover further than God's general goodness to such as please him: but no foundation can be gathered thence of his readiness to pardon offenders, which being an act of grace, must alone be discovered by his will. I cannot think the sun, moon, and stars, are such itinerant preachers, as to unfold unto us the whole counsel and will of God, in reference to man's acceptance with God upon repentance. It is not every star in the firmament can do that which the star once did to the wise men, lead them unto Christ. The sun in the heavens is no Parelius to the Sun of Righteousness. The best astronomer will never find "the day-star from on high" in the rest of his number. What St. Austin said of Tully's works, is true of the whole volume of the creation; there are admirable things to be found in them; but the name of Christ is not legible there. The work of redemption is not engraven on the works of providence; if it had, a particular divine revelation had been unnecessary, and the apostles were sent on a needless errand, which the world had understood without their preaching, viz. "that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." 2 Cor. v. 19. I grant that God's long-suffering and patience are intended to lead men to repentance, and that some general collections might be made from providence of the placability of God's nature, and that God never left himself without a witness of his goodness in the world, being kind to the unthankful, and doing good, in giving rain and fruitful seasons, Acts xiv. 17, yet all this amounts not to a firm foundation for faith, as to the remission of sin, which doth suppose God himself publishing an act of grace and indemnity to the world, wherein he assures the pardon of sin to such as truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel.

2. The scriptures give the most faithful representation of the state and condition of the soul of man. The world was almost lost in disputes concerning the nature, condition, and immortality of the soul, before divine revelation was made known to mankind by the gospel of Christ; but life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel. So that the gospel of Christ is the fullest instrument of discovery of the certainty of the future state of the soul, and the conditions which abide it. But this is not all; the scripture is not only a perspective glass, to discover all the spots and deformities of the soul: and not only shows where they are, but whence they came, what their nature is, and whither they tend. But that which tends most to awaken the drowsy, senseless spirits of men, the scripture doth most fully describe the tendency of corruption, that "the wages of sin is death." Rom. vi. 23.

3. The scriptures discover to us the only way of pleasing God and enjoying his favour. They show us that the ground of our acceptance with God is through Christ, whom he hath made a propitiation for the sins of the world, and who alone is the true and living way whereby we may draw near to God with a true heart. Now what things can there be of greater moment and importance for men to know, or God to reveal, than the nature of God, and ourselves, the state and conditions of our souls, the only way to avoid eternal misery, and enjoy everlasting bliss?

The scriptures discover not only matters of importance, but of the greatest depth and mysteriousness. There are many wonderful things in the law of God; things we may admire, but are never able to comprehend. Such are the doctrine of the Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the manner of the operation of the Spirit of God on the souls of men; which are all things of great weight and moment for us to understand and believe, and yet may be unsearchable to our reason, as to the particular manner of them.

II. The manner wherein they are revealed.

1. In a clear and perspicuous manner. Not but there may be still some passages which are hard to be understood, as being either prophetic, or consisting of ambiguous phrases, or containing matters above our comprehension; but all those things which concern the terms of man's salvation, are delivered with the greatest evidence and perspicuity. Who cannot understand what these things mean? "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly?" that "without faith it is impossible to please God;" that "without holiness none shall see the Lord;" that "unless we be born again, we can never enter into the kingdom of heaven." John iii. 5. These, and such like things, are so plain and clear, that it is nothing but men's shutting their eyes against the light can keep them from understanding them. God intended these things as directions to men; and is not he able to speak intelligibly when he pleases? He that made the tongue, shall he not speak so as to be understood without an infallible interpreter? "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

2. In a powerful and authoritative manner; as the things contained in the scripture do not so much beg acceptance as command it; in that the expressions wherein our duty is concerned, are such as awe men's

consciences and pierce to their hearts, and to their secret thoughts. Heb. iv. 12, 13. All things are open and naked before this word of God; every secret of the mind and thought of the heart lies open to its force, it is quick and powerful. The word is a telescope to discover the great luminaries of the world, the truths of the highest concernment to the souls of men, and it is such a microscope as discovers to us the smallest atoms of our thoughts, and discerns the most secret intent of the heart. And as far as this light reacheth, it comes with power and authority, as it comes armed with the majesty of that God who reveals it.

3. In a pure and unmixed manner; in all other writings, how good soever, we have a great mixture of dross and gold together; here is nothing but pure gold, diamonds without flaws, suns without spots. There is a Urin and Thummim upon the whole scripture, light and perfection in every part of it. Hence it is called "the form of sound words."

4. In an uniform and agreeable manner.

(1.) This doctrine was delivered by persons who lived in different ages and times from each other. Usually one age corrects another's faults; and we are apt to pity the ignorance of our predecessors, when it may be, our posterity may think us as ignorant as we do them. But in sacred scripture we read not one age condemning another; we find light still increasing in the series of time in scripture, but no reflections in any time upon the ignorance or weakness of the precedent; the dimmest light was sufficient for its age, and was a step to farther discovery.

(2.) By persons of different interests in the world. God made choice of men of all ranks to be inditers of his oracles, to make it appear it was no matter of state policy nor particular interest which was contained in his word, which persons of such different interests could not have agreed in as they do. We have Moses, David, Solomon, persons of royal rank and quality; and can it be any mean thing, which these think it their glory to be penners of? We have Isaiah, Daniel, and other persons of the highest education and accomplishments, and can it be any trivial thing which these employ themselves in? We have Amos, and other prophets in the Old Testament, and the apostles in the New, of the meaner sort of men in the world, yet all these join in consort together: when God tunes their spirits, all agree in the same strain of divine truths, and give light and harmony to each other.

(3.) By persons of different places and conditions; some in prosperity in their own country, some under banishment and adversity, yet all agreeing in the same substance of doctrine; of which no alteration, we see, was made either for the flattery of those in power, or for avoiding miseries and calamities. And under all the different dispensations before, under, and after the law, though the management of things was different, yet the doctrine and design was for substance the same in all.

5. In a persuasive and convincing manner; and that in these ways:

(1.) Bringing divine truths down to our capacity, clothing spiritual matter in familiar expressions and similitudes, that so they might have the easier admission into their minds. (2.) Propounding things as our interest, which are our duty: thence God so frequently in scripture

recommends our duties to us under all those motives which are wont to have the greatest force on the mind ; of grace, favour, protection, deliverance, audience of prayers, and eternal happiness. And if these will not prevail with men, what motives will? (3.) Courting us to obedience, when he might not only command us to obey, but punish presently for disobedience. Hence are all those most pathetic and affectionate strains we read in scripture :—"O that there were such a heart within them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments!" Deut. v. 29. "Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean?" Jer. xiii. 27. "Turn ye, turn ye." Ezek. xxxiii. 11. "O Jerusalem! Jerusalem!" Matt. xxiii. 37. What majesty, and yet what sweetness and condescension is there in these expressions! Such a matchless and unparalleled strain of rhetoric is there in the scripture, far above the art and insinuations of the most admired orators.

III. The scriptures may be considered as a rule of life, or as a law of God which is given for the government of the lives of men, and therein the excellency of them lies.

1. In the nature of the duties required, which are

(1.) Most becoming God to require, as they are most suitable and agreeable to the Divine nature, the imitation of which in our actions is the substance of our religion. Imitation of him in his goodness and holiness, by our constant endeavours of mortifying sin and growing in grace and piety. In his grace and mercy, by our kindness to all men, forgiving the injuries men do unto us, doing good to our greatest enemies. In his justice and equity, by doing as we would be done by, and keeping a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.

(2.) They are most reasonable for us to perform, in that,

1.) Religion is not only a service of the reasonable faculties which are employed the most in it, the commands of the scripture reaching the heart most, and the service required being a spiritual service, not lying in meats and drinks, or any outward observations, but in a sanctified temper of heart and mind ; but, 2.) The service itself of religion is reasonable ; the commands of the gospel are such, as no man's reason which considers them, can doubt of the excellency of them. All natural worship is founded on the dictates of nature, all instituted worship, on God's revealed will ; and it is one of the prime dictates of nature, that God must be universally obeyed.

2. The encouragement is more than proportionable to the difficulty of obedience. God's commands are in themselves easy, and most suitable to our nature. What more rational for a creature than to obey his Maker? all the difficulty of religion ariseth from the corruption of our nature. Now, God, to encourage men to conquer the difficulties arising thence, hath propounded the strongest motives and the most prevailing arguments to obedience. Such are the considerations of God's love and goodness manifested to the world by sending his Son into it to die for sinners, and to give them an example which they are to follow ; and by his readiness through him to pardon the sins, and accept the persons of such who so receive him as to walk in him ; and by his promises of grace to assist them in wrestling with the enemies of their salvation. And to all these, add that glorious and inconceivable reward which God hath promised to all those who sincerely obey him.

The excellency of the Scriptures appears as they contain in them a covenant of grace, or the transactions between God and man in order to his eternal happiness. The more memorable any transactions are, the more valuable are any authentic records of them. The Scriptures contain in them the magna charta of heaven, an act of pardon with the royal assent of heaven, a proclamation of good-will from God towards men. It remains only, then, that we adore and magnify the goodness of God in making known his will to us, and that we set a value and esteem on the Scriptures, as on the only authentic instruments of that grand charter of peace, which God hath revealed in order to man's eternal happiness.

OF

GOD AND HIS NATURAL PERFECTIONS.

God is a spirit.—John iv. 24.

THE existence of God, and several of his perfections, open themselves with shining evidence in his works and in his word ; but the manner of his existence, and the eminent perfections, as they really exist in him, are wrapped up in thick and awful darkness, as a pavilion round about him. These are far, infinitely far, above our reach : “ Who by searching can find out God ? ” Job xi. 7. We can easier say what he is not than what he is. O, may he assist our thoughts, lest we darken counsel by words without knowledge, while we speak concerning him !

I. That there is but one God, or one Divine Being.

That there is only one God is the concurring language of the genuine light of nature and of Scripture revelation. We are led into this sentiment,

1. By the light of nature.

The very notion it gives us of a God, and the very same arguments by which it proves that there is a God, must, if duly pursued, necessarily lead us into the thought, that there can be no more gods than one ; for there can be but one necessarily existent Being, one First Cause, one absolutely infinite, one Supreme. Hence, though the rude, unthinking multitude among the pagans were led, perhaps chiefly by the wild fictions of the poets, into the absurd notion of gods many and lords many, yet the soberer and wiser of their philosophers had their one supreme God, and all the rest were looked upon but as petty deities. Their most celebrated writers go into this way of representing things ; and it is notorious that Socrates fell a sacrifice to Athenian fury for asserting the doctrine of one God. But we are still more abundantly assured of this important doctrine,

2. By Scripture revelation.

The great and blessed God himself has given us the clearest evidence of his unity in his word. “ I, even I, am he.” Deut. xxxii. 39. “ Before me there was no god formed.” Isa. xliii. 10. “ I am the first.” Rev. i. 11. And the sacred writers, under Divine inspiration, have

said of him, "The Lord he is God," Deut. iv. 35, and, "Hear, O Israel!" Deut. vi. 4; and, "Thou art great," says the Psalmist, Ps. lxxxvi. 10.

All this is evidently brought over by our Lord into the doctrine of the New Testament: he told the scribe that came to question him, the first of all the commandments. Mark xii. 29. And he spoke with high approbation of the answer, ver. 32—34.

II. That this God is a spirit, or that he is a spiritual being.

God is a spirit. This relates to the nature of God, and as a spirit is the most excellent of beings that we have any notions of, God is represented under this character to heighten our thoughts of him. We indeed know but little of the nature of spirits. The most natural, obvious thought, that arises in our minds about a spirit is, that it is an incorporeal and invisible being, with life and action, understanding and will.

Let us, then, a little consider these, as applicable to God.

1. He is incorporeal and invisible.

All corporeal beings consist of parts, and so are in their own nature capable of separation or dissolution, of alterations, additions, or diminutions, and of different figures, sizes, shapes, or forms; but all this argues composition and imperfection.

God can, indeed, by his infinite power, make what visible appearances he pleases, as he did in various forms, under the Old Testament, and at Christ's baptism and transfiguration in the new; but these were not appearances of the essence of God itself, they were only outward symbols, which he occasionally formed to notify his presence for special purposes; but as to his own nature, or essence, he is the "invisible God, whom no man hath seen, nor can see." Col. i. 1. 1 Tim. vi. 16. Accordingly, our Lord says of his Father, "Ye have neither heard his voice." John v. 37.

Whenever, therefore, we read in Scripture of any representations of God, as having eyes, ears, or as seeing, hearing, we are by no means to imagine that he hath such bodily organs, or acts by them; for, "to whom will you liken God?" Isa. xl. 18.

2. He lives and acts, or is a being that has life and action.

He is usually styled, by way of eminence, the living God: he "has life in himself;" and with him is the fountain of life. John v. 26. Ps. xxxvi. 9. All the life of the vegetative, animal, and rational world; the life of nature and the life of grace here, and the life of glory hereafter, are of him, and derived from him; and therefore he himself must live.

And as he is a living, so he is an active spirit; he is ever active within himself, in the communion of the sacred Three with each other in the one undivided Godhead; ever active in his purposes and designs to display his own glory, and particularly the riches of his glory in and through a Redeemer. And he is ever capable of acting out of himself. He hath been, is and ever will be, incessantly active, in upholding, exciting, or restraining, guiding, and governing all that he has made, to the glory of his own great name; for, "of him, through him." Rom. xi. 36.

3. He has an understanding and will.

Had not God an understanding, he could never have designed any thing; and had he not a will, he could never have determined upon the execution of any design. "How manifold are his works!" Ps. civ. 24. "And he works all things." Eph. i. 11. "He is wonderful in counsel." Isa. xxviii. 29. "And he does according to his will." Dan. iv. 35.

III. That God is an infinitely perfect spirit.

By his being an infinitely perfect spirit, we may understand, that he is a spirit possessed of all possible perfections.

1. God is an infinite spirit.

Nothing short of infinity can be ascribed to God; for he can neither limit his own being and perfections, nor can he be limited by any other. The farther our notions go in inquiries after him, the more they lose themselves in solemn wonder at his unsearchable greatness. But, oh, how do we find ourselves ingulfed, and, as it were, blinded with dazzling light, and lost in our darkness and nothingness, when we read the magnificent accounts the sacred oracles give of him! "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket." Isa. xl. 15, 17.

2. He is a self-sufficient, independent spirit.

His existence is of himself, not as an effect from its cause; but he is of himself, as necessarily existing by the essential perfection of his own nature, without dependence on any other being. His name is, "I am that I am;" Ex. iii. 14; and "He only has immortality," in and of himself. 1 Tim. vi. 16. And as he is, by the perfection of his nature, self-sufficient for his own being, so he is for his own glory and blessedness. He is "exalted in himself above all blessing and praise." Neh. ix. 5. His name is El Shaddai, God all-sufficient, and he is "the Lord that maketh all things." Isa. xlv. 24. "For his pleasure they are and were created." Rev. iv. 11. But none can be profitable to God.

3. He is an eternal spirit.

His self-sufficiency and independency make it impossible that he should ever begin to be, or cease from being. "Before the mountains were brought forth." Ps. xc. 2. He is without beginning, and without succession of time or age. "The Lord shall endure for ever." Ps. ix. 7, and cii. 27.

4. He is an unchangeable spirit.

"With him there is no variableness, or shadow of turning." James i. 17. There can be no change in him, as to posture, situation, or place.

He is unchangeable in his being and perfections.

He is unchangeable in his glory. Though the manifestations of his glory, and due ascriptions of it to him, may vary; yet he is, and ever was, infinitely glorious in himself.

His blessedness is as unchangeable as his glory; for as this consists in the enjoyment of himself, so it neither can be increased nor lessened. "Look unto the heavens, and see." Job xxxv. 5—7. And it may be said of our Lord's own mediatorial goodness, that "it extendeth not to him," so as that he should be a real gainer by it. Ps. xvi. 2.

He is unchangeable in his decrees. "He is of one mind, who can turn him? The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever." Ps. xxxiii. 11. And he has proclaimed, with the majesty of a God, "my counsel shall stand." Isa. xlv. 10, 11.

And he is unchangeable in his covenant love, and promises to his people: for "the mountains shall depart." Isa. liv. 10. "I am the Lord, I change not." Mal. iii. 6.

Whenever, therefore, we read in scripture of God's repenting, and the like, it is not to be understood of any alteration in his purposes; but all such expressions are to be understood with relation to his outward dispensations. All those affections of love, joy, grief, and hatred, that are ascribed to God—these are not properly affections, that take their turns in his heart, as they do in ours; but they are expressions of the agreeableness, or disagreeableness, of persons and things to his holy nature.

5. He is an omnipresent spirit.

His infinite essence spreads, in an inconceivable manner, through infinite space, without any parts or bounds: it is intimately near to, and in all creatures, in all places, in heaven, earth, and hell, and in all possible space that is between and beyond them. "Do not I fill heaven and earth, says the Lord?" Jer. xxiii. 24. "He is not far from any of us, for in him we live." Acts xvii. 27, 28. Wherever we are, whatever we do, and whithersoever we go, there is no flying away from God. "Though they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down." Amos ix. 2, 3. And the Psalmist, in his elegant description of him, says, "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?" Ps. cxxxix. 7—10.

Whenever, therefore, we read of God's dwelling in the heavens, coming down from thence, and drawing near to us; or, of forsaking us, and returning to his place, and the like; such expressions are not to be understood as if, in his natural being, he were more in one place than another; but they are to be understood of his actions and manifestations of himself, in a way of mercy or judgment.

6. He is an all-knowing spirit.

His omnipresence is with all intelligence attending it, because he is an omnipresent spirit. "His understanding is infinite. There is not any creature that is not manifest in his sight." Heb. iv. 13. He knows all our works and ways. "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings." Job xxxiv. 21, 22. He knows all the secret thoughts of our hearts, all our inmost principles. "The righteous God trieth the hearts and reins." Ps. vii. 9. Hence Peter could make this humble appeal to Christ, "Lord, thou knowest all things." John xxi. 17.

And as to all things past and to come, he challenges the gods of the heathen as incapable of knowing them like him. "Let them show the former things, what they be." Isa. xli. 22, 23. "But known unto the Lord are all his works." Acts xv. 18. And he "calls those things that are not as though they were."

All these things he knows of himself without information from others, and without any external medium to assist him; for "who has taught him knowledge?" Isa. xl. 14. "He that teacheth man knowledge, shall

not he know?" Ps. xciv. 10. He knows every thing perfectly and distinctly, with the utmost accuracy. "Yea, the darkness hideth not from him." Ps. cxxxix. 12. "The very hairs of our head are all numbered." Matt. x. 30. His knowledge is ever the same; it is perpetual and everlasting. "He neither slumbers nor sleeps;" and "a thousand years in his sight are but as yesterday." Ps. cxxi. 4; xc. 4.

7. He is an almighty spirit.

He is able to do all that can be the object of power, and that is every thing that does not imply a contradiction, either to his own perfections, or to the nature of things themselves. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." Ps. xxxiii. 6—9. And he "is able to do exceeding abundantly, above all that we can ask or think." Eph. iii. 20.

Application.

1. How absurd and abominable are all pretended images or pictures of God!

None can draw the figure, or carve the image of his own soul. How monstrously foolish, then, must it be, to offer any visible portraiture of the invisible God! Jer. x. 8—14. It changes the truth of God into a lie, and degrades the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of corruptible creatures. Rom. i. 23—25.

2. What awful sentiments should we entertain of the great God, and what solemn regards of him!

With what serious attention and spiritual frames of heart should we worship! With what adoring reverence and profound humility should we ever think and speak of him! With what subjection, resignation, and obedience, should we yield up our souls without reserve to him! With what solemnity should we consider ourselves, as his entire dependents, as always in his sight and presence, as accountable to him for all that we think, say, or do!

3. What a dreadful enemy, and what a comfortable friend must this great God be!

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. "Who can stand before his indignation?" Nah. i. 6. Ezek. xxii. 14. But oh, who can rate the happiness of having an interest in the favour of the infinite, eternal, unchangeable, and almighty God? In his favour is life and his loving-kindness is better than life. The eternal God is the people's refuge; and, "if God be for us, who can be against us?"

4. How thankfully should we embrace a gospel revelation, which opens the way of sinful creatures' access to God, and acceptance with him through a Redeemer!

Without this discovery of him, every thought of his greatness must make creatures conscious of guilt tremble before him; but in Christ we may behold him as a Father of mercies, and a God of all consolation.

THE

MORAL PERFECTIONS OF GOD.

Your Father which is in heaven is perfect.—Matt. v. 48.

THE knowledge of God being necessary to the practice of true religion, it greatly concerns us to form just apprehensions of him. The natural perfections of the Divine Being have been represented; those that are commonly called moral, are the subject of the present. Moral perfections are the same in God and creatures, as to kind, though infinitely different as to degrees; what we read in the verse of the text plainly supposes this.—“Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Matt. v. 48.

The perfections of the moral sort, which we find ascribed to God in his word, may be reduced to these: wisdom, goodness, holiness, justice, and truth. These shall be now distinctly considered; and under each particular, I shall endeavour to show what practical improvement should be made of it by us; then conclude with some general reflections.

I. God is perfectly wise.

Wisdom implies knowledge: it is the right use of knowledge: it lies not only in the understanding, but in the will. He acts wisely whose will is directed by right reason, who does that which is fit to be done. This excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. Nor is it less evident that wisdom belongs to God. With what brightness does his wisdom shine in his works! How vast are his schemes of creation, providence, and redemption! With what exquisite skill are their various parts contrived and adjusted to promote his grand design! The Psalmist was thrown into a rapture at the contemplation of some of God’s works here below; when he viewed their beautiful order, he cried out, “O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.” Ps. civ. 24. The consideration of a particular branch of Divine providence, had the same effect upon the apostle, which he thus expressed: “O the depth of the riches!” Rom. xi. 33. How has he abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence in the contrivance of the method of our redemption by Christ Jesus! The publication of this is spoken of as a discovery of God’s manifold wisdom. Eph. iii. 10.

It has pleased the Father of lights to “teach us more than the beasts of the earth.” Job xxxv. 11. He has communicated much larger measures of his wisdom to the angels, who dwell in the regions of light; yet the scripture speaks as if the character of wise was peculiar to him: he is styled again, and again, “the only wise God, who is wonderful in counsel.” Isa. xxviii. 29.

The practical improvement.

1. We should be hereby excited to seek wisdom. To this we are exhorted: “Get wisdom, get understanding.” Prov. iv. 5—7. Let this engage our greatest care and most diligent application. There is hardly any thing of which men are more ambitious, than to be thought wise: it would be happy for them if they were as much concerned to

obtain true wisdom. The fear of the Lord is the beginning, or the principal part of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.

2. Is God perfectly wise? then we should ask wisdom of him. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." James i. 5. Would you be made wise unto salvation, apply to Christ Jesus, "in whom are hid all treasures of wisdom." He is made of God wisdom to those that are in him.

3. Is God perfectly wise? then certainly it becomes us to resign to his will and acquiesce in his appointments. What can be more reasonable than that we leave him to govern the world, who made it so wisely?

II. God is perfectly good.

His other attributes are rendered amiable and engaging to us by his goodness: it is upon the account of this, that he bears the endearing character of Father in relation to us, which is given him in the text: "Your Father which is in heaven." It was goodness that moved him to create the world: and as the good pleasure of God raised the universe out of nothing, so is his goodness poured out, as it were, upon all his works. Moses, when he writes the history of the creation, closes his account of every day's work with this expression, "God saw that it was good."

How extensive is the Divine goodness! "The Lord is good unto all." Ps. cxlv. 9—16. "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." Ps. xxxiii. 5. It is said to be "great above the heavens." Ps. cviii. 4. It shines in the upper world with amazing lustre; there is no exhausting of this, it endureth for ever.

1. Is God perfectly good? then all our powers ought to be awakened to bless his name. The sense which the Psalmist had of God's goodness, made him press his soul with great earnestness to offer praise unto him upon this account. "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" Ps. ciii. How often does he repeat that wish in Ps. cvii. 21, "O that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!"

2. Is God perfectly good? How hateful then should sin be unto us! As our sinfulness illustrates the goodness of God, their being committed against an infinitely good God, adds an inconceivable weight to our guilt. The riches of God's goodness leads men to repentance; not only as they encourage their return to God, but as they manifest the great evil of their transgressions.

3. Is God perfectly good? Ought it not to be our ambition to imitate his goodness? "To do good, forget not. Do good to them that hate you."

III. God is perfectly holy.

To be holy doth often signify in the scriptures to be set apart from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent use. In this sense the sabbath-day is styled holy; and the character of holy may be given to God, to denote the transcendent excellences of his nature, whereby he is infinitely separated and distinguished from all other beings. Again, by holiness, the word of God frequently means a separation from moral evil. "As he that has called you is holy." 1 Pet. i. 15. Perfecting

holiness in the fear of God, stands in opposition to all filthiness both of flesh and spirit. Without doubt, God is infinitely holy in this respect. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all," *i. e.* no moral imperfection. He is without iniquity. "He is of purer eyes than to behold evil." But there is something positive in God's holiness. The beauty of holiness, which is a description given of God, must needs signify not only a freedom from all blemishes, but the possession of every thing that is excellent and amiable.

The holiness of God is a perfection, for the honour of which he has a very high regard, therefore he swears by it. "Once have I sworn by my holiness." Ps. lxxxix. 35. It is his most distinguishing style, that he is glorious in holiness. The seraphim cried one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts!"

Use.

We should press it on our conscience, as a most powerful argument to induce us to follow after holiness. Thus God condescends to reason with us: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." They and they only are blessed who dwell in his presence: this shall be the felicity of those who are truly sanctified. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matt. v. 8. If we would not be debarred a blissful sight of God, let us "follow after holiness." Heb. xii. 14.

IV. God is perfectly just.

Justice is commonly distinguished into commutative and distributive. Commutative justice lies in an equal exchange of benefits; and ought to be observed by us in our dealings with each other. But such are the perfections of God, so entire is our dependence upon him, that it is impossible we should lay any obligations on him: therefore this sort of justice can have no place in his transactions with us. "Who hath first given unto the Lord?"

Distributive justice, which ought to be exercised by rulers towards their subjects, consists in the equitable division of rewards and punishments. We may be sure that God is a righteous governor. Men, notwithstanding their most careful inquiries, may be imposed on by false evidence. But all things are naked and open unto God.

Again, the great God cannot be awed by any power to pervert judgment. "Surely the Almighty will not pervert judgment." Job xxxiv. 12.

God cannot be biassed by the prospect of any profit to depart from that which is right: this is a spring of a great deal of injustice amongst men. But the Most High is infinitely above every temptation of this kind. "The Lord your God is God of gods." Deut. x. 17. "He is a righteous Lord, and he loveth righteousness."

The judgments of God are a great deep; they cannot be fathomed by us at present; but his righteousness is like the great mountains, very obvious. "Righteous art thou, O Lord." How we ought to be affected with this perfection of God!

1. Should not the consideration of God's justice awaken in us an holy awe of him? The Psalmist declares, that his flesh trembled for the fear of God: he was afraid of his judgments.

2. Is God perfectly just? Is it not then of the greatest concern to us

guilty creatures, that we be found in Jesus Christ? Should we not without delay apply ourselves to Christ, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood?" Rom. iii. 25, 26.

Perfectly true, which is the

V. and last of the Divine perfections.

This, as it is a moral virtue, signifies a conformity of words to thoughts, then it is styled veracity; and a conformity of actions to words, then it is called faithfulness. God is perfectly true in each of these respects: as it is impossible for him to be deceived, so it is certain that he will not deceive. "A God of truth." Deut. xxxii. 4. His faithfulness shall never fail. "The mountains shall depart." Isa. liv. 10. "It is impossible for God to lie." Heb. vi. 18. Nor is God liable to a change of mind. "He is not a man that he should lie."

1. We may hence learn, that we ought heartily to embrace whatever God has revealed to us; though our reason cannot comprehend it, yet if we have sufficient evidence of its being spoken by God, we may be sure it is true.

2. We may hence infer the reasonableness of a stedfast reliance on God's promises. Great is the guilt of those who will not believe God; they are said to make him a liar.

Reflections.

1. It should yield us great satisfaction to consider, that such a perfect being as God is governs the world; who is infinitely wise, good, holy, just, and true.

2. We should, in our contemplations of God, and conduct towards him, have a strict regard to the harmony of his attributes. He never displays any one of his excellencies but in a consistence with the honour of the rest.

3. Blessed are they who upon good grounds can call this perfect Being their Father and their God. That this may be our happiness, let us sincerely give up ourselves to God through Christ, and take him to be our portion for ever. "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" Ps. lxiii. 25.

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD,

AS THE PRESERVER AND SOVEREIGN DISPOSER OF ALL THINGS IN THE
NATURAL WORLD.

The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.—Ps. ciii. 19.

THIS is a very grand representation of the majesty of the great God. As an earthly monarch sits upon his throne, and keeps his court in some one capital city, and from thence extends his dominion and government over the whole kingdom; so, in allusion hereunto, the great and mighty God, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords, is here represented as having prepared his throne in the heavens, and from thence extending his sovereign dominion and influence as wide as universal nature, over

all creatures, and over all worlds. By the kingdom of God, we are here to understand his providence, or his preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions. The subjects of this universal kingdom may be distinguished into natural and moral. By the moral world, we mean the rational part of the creation, or those creatures who are fit subjects of a moral law, as angels and men, considered as reasonable creatures. By the natural world, we understand the whole mass of matter, which is variously disposed into a multitude of shapes and forms, and different sorts of creatures, as sun, moon, and stars, air, earth, and sea; with all the vast variety with which they are stored, and by which they are inhabited. God's providential kingdom is absolutely universal, and over all. But at present, consider the providence of God, as the preserver and sovereign disposer of all things, in the natural world only.

I. To prove that there is a providence, which presides over the whole course of nature, and all the world of creatures. This may be argued,

1. From the perfections of God: and of those we need only single out his knowledge and his wisdom, his goodness and his power; for if we believe that God is infinitely possessed of such perfections as these, it will hardly be possible for us to stop short of believing his providence. For will not his wisdom and goodness incline him to take care of his creatures, and govern them in the best manner? Can we suppose the universal Parent of all creatures and worlds to be like the foolish ostrich? Job xxxix. 16. And since God is almighty, no reasonable doubt can remain of his providence.

2. One may produce many express testimonies out of scripture, for the proof of a providence. It is said, that God upholdeth all things, and that they continue according to his ordinance. "He appointeth the moon for seasons." Ps. civ. 19. "He bringeth the winds out of his treasure." Ps. cxxxv. 7. God is the supreme governor among the nations. This providence of God presides not only over great and important affairs, but it reaches to the minutest creatures. As in Matt. x. 29, 30:—"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" But I should transcribe a great part of the Bible, should I collect all the proofs. I will only further hint to you one article of the doctrine of providence, which we learn from scripture, viz. that the kingdom of providence is administered by Christ our Saviour. "It is by him that all things consist." Col. i. 17. "And to him is all power given." Matt. xxviii. 18. The whole administration of providence, over all creatures and all worlds, is committed into the hands of the Mediator, Jesus Christ; which speaks both the dignity of his person, and the safety and happiness of his friends and people. If any further proof were wanting, one might,

3. Appeal to the appearance of things; to the frame of nature, and the continued order and harmony of the whole creation; where we have as good testimonies to a providence, as to the very being of a God. Can it be only by chance, that day and night, and summer and winter, so regularly succeed to one another? Did all things happen by mere chance, it would be altogether uncertain when spring or the autumn season would come; or whether either of them would come any more; nay, it would be ten thousand times more likely that all things would

presently run into confusion and disorder. It is, therefore, most reasonable to ascribe it to the providence of God, that "seed time and harvest." Gen. viii. 22.

II. To explain and illustrate the providence of God in the natural world, by some of the principal acts of it.

1. The providence of God is exercised in preserving his creatures.

(1.) In the preservation of the several species or kinds of animal creatures: so that though all the individuals die, one after another, yet no species is lost out of the creation, but most probably, and as far as we can learn from the most ancient account of things, there are all sorts of creatures still in the world, that were at first. And this is truly wonderful, if we consider what a natural enmity there is betwixt some animals and others, and with what diligence men have endeavoured in all ages to destroy some whole kinds of them. The due proportion of the various inhabitants of the world to one another; and especially of the males to the females, which is so constantly preserved throughout the animal creation, is a very sensible instance of providential care.

(2.) God preserves them by his providence in their individual beings, until the end has been answered for which he made them. It is God that holdeth our soul in life. In him we live. We are the living instances of Divine preservation; hitherto God has helped us. Nor is God's providential care confined to man. "He heareth the young ravens' cry." "Not a sparrow falls to the ground." Matt. x. 29.

2. As God preserves, so he also disposes of, and governs all creatures and their actions by his providence.

(1.) The inanimate creatures. He who fixed the laws of nature in the first creation, does still by his providence continue their force and power. "He binds the sweet influences of Pleiades, and looses the bands of Orion." Job xxxviii. 31, &c. "He giveth the former and the latter rain: and he stays the bottles of heaven." Thus does God keep the springs of universal nature in his own hand, and turns them which way soever he pleaseth.

(2.) The whole animal creation. "The beasts of the forest are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills;" they are all his creatures, and the subjects of his providence. What but a providence could direct every beast, bird, and insect, where to seek its food and its habitation? Or teach every parent-animal how to take the properest care of its young? Or, what is it that conducts those birds, who shift their country and climate at certain seasons of the year, in their passage to some distant land, where multitudes of them never were before? "The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times." Jer. viii. 7. Had they reason like men, how little would it help them to find their way through the pathless air, without needle or compass? What is their guide but Providence?

III. To lay before you some of the most remarkable properties of God's providence, as it appears in the natural world.

1. The wisdom of Providence. A property so remarkable, that one may apply those words of the apostle to the mysteries of Providence, as well as those of grace: "O the depth of the riches!" How is the wisdom of God displayed in his preserving and governing the whole

frame of nature! It is by this the "sparrow is directed to find a house, and the swallow a nest for herself." How admirably is the wisdom of Providence displayed in the different instincts of the various tribes of animals! Can we observe these things, and a thousand more of the same kind, and not confess and admire the wisdom of Providence?

Or, if we hearken to the voice even of storms and tempests, they will farther declare to us the admirable wisdom of that God, whose word they obey and whose designs they execute. Who, upon a view of the wisdom of Providence in the natural world, can forbear saying, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!"

2. The goodness and kindness of it. And we need not go far for instances and proofs of this; for, "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." Ps. xxxiii. 5. There is not a creature that lives in all the world but bears a testimony to the goodness of Providence. "These all wait upon God, and he giveth them their meat in due season." Ps. civ. 27, 28. God extends his kind regard to many thousands of creatures, who have no capacity of knowing and praising their Benefactor. "Shall not I spare Nineveh, (saith God,) that great city?" Jonah iv. 11. "He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle." Ps. civ. 14, 15. And as God has plentifully stored the earth with the blessings of his goodness, so his providence kindly directs us to find out the various uses, whether for food or physic, for necessary support, or for convenience and delight.

3. It is very powerful. God upholdeth all things by the word of his power. The continued harmony of nature, and the constant and regular revolutions of seasons, are sensible demonstrations of the power of God. "Thou hast established the earth." Ps. cxix. 90, 91. God brings forth Mazaroth in his season, he guides Arcturus with his sons. He reneweth the face of the earth after the dearth of winter. And the same Almighty God, who created this world at first, and still upholds the whole frame of nature, will one day display his mighty power by dissolving it again, and changing it into another form. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." 2 Pet. iii. 10—13.

Improvement.

1. To raise our admiring thoughts to the great God. What a great and mighty Being must he be, who is able thus to wield and manage the whole frame of nature! "How large and manifold is his wisdom! He satisfieth the desire of every living thing."

2. We may infer, how terrible the wrath of this great and mighty God must be, and of what importance it is to secure his favour. So Pharaoh and the Egyptians found it a very dreadful thing to have that God against them, "whose kingdom ruleth over all;" who had beasts and insects, hail and fire, &c. absolutely at his disposal. Only to be without God in the world, to be without his favour, is a very sad circumstance; how much worse to have him for our enemy! How much is it to our interest, while as yet there is hope, to seek after reconciliation and peace with this great and terrible God! And if we return to him in his appointed way, he will be at peace with us, yea, he will "delight over us, to bless us."

3. Let the reconciled friends and people of God learn from hence to

trust and acquiesce in Providence : "It is the Lord that gives, and the Lord that takes away. He that spared not his own Son." Rom. viii. 32.

4. Let us learn to observe and adore the providence of God in all that befalls us, and to bless him for all our enjoyments and comforts. What love, and duty, and honour, do all men owe to him, "whose tender mercies are over all his works!"

OF

GOD AS THE GOVERNOR AND JUDGE

OF THE MORAL WORLD, ANGELS, AND MEN.

And he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.—Dan. iv. 35.

THESE are the words of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, whose understanding was now returned to him, after he had eaten grass like oxen, till his hair was grown like eagles' feathers ; but at length, being restored to his kingdom, and the use of his reason, "He blesses the Most High, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and whose kingdom is from generation to generation ; and who doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." In these last words he acknowledges the absolute dominion of God over angels and men, which are the only orders of creatures we know of endued with intellectual faculties, and capable of moral government.

I. God is the sovereign Lord and Governor of angels.

These are described by the apostle to the Hebrews as ministering spirits. The angels are endued with more excellent perfections than man, as they not only discern between good and evil, but know all things that are in the earth. 2 Sam. xiv. 17—20. "They excel in strength." Ps. ciii. 20. The number of angels is very great. In my text they are called an "army ;" and in other places, "the host of heaven ;" the apostle to the Hebrews calls them an "innumerable company ;" Heb. xii. 22 ; and St. John, in his Revelations, "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." Rev. v. 11. But we have the most magnificent account of their numbers in this prophecy of Daniel, chap. vii. 9 ; "I beheld till the thrones were cast down." Among this glorious order of beings there are different degrees, as archangels, thrones, dominions, &c. but what these several names import, would be mere presumption for us to determine. The angels are now divided into good and evil.

The good angels are those who have maintained their integrity, and persevered in their allegiance. These are the proper inhabitants of the heavenly world, and always behold the face of their Father with a holy transport, and receive the most delightful tokens of his love. They are also the ministers of his providence, and stand in a continual readiness to obey his will. An angel foretold to Abraham the birth of his

son Isaac ; others were sent to Jacob, to Lot, to Samson, on special occasions ; and they frequently attended our Saviour when he dwelt on earth. All good men are supposed to be under their protection. "He shall give his angels charge over thee." Ps. xci. 11, 12. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him." Ps. xxxiv. 7. And as they are the guardians of good men against the innumerable temptations and dangers of life, they are also appointed to assist them in their last conflicts, to receive their departing spirits ; and at the end of the world, when the great day of righteous judgment shall come, "God will send forth his angels." Matt. xiii. 49, 50.

The evil angels are those who through the pride of their hearts rebelled against their Maker in the day of trial, and were therefore cast down from their station. Their captain, or chief, is called in scripture "the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air, Beelzebub." Eph. ii. 2. And his angels, or servants, go to and fro over the whole earth, sometimes like cunning serpents, insinuating into the hearts of men ; and at other times like roaring lions. The fallen angels are subject to God's absolute control, and can do no mischief without a Divine permission. Satan could not hurt Job nor his family, until he had obtained leave. The good angels are God's servants, and the evil ones his slaves.

II. The government of God over mankind, or the inhabitants of the earth.

Man is a free agent, endued with a power of determining his own actions ; and, consequently, the subject of moral government. The government of God over men may be divided into,

1. His providential government, *i. e.* directing and influencing the actions of men and the occurrences of the world, so as to make them subservient to the purposes of his own pleasure. The winds and the waves obey the Divine command ; and the Most High does whatsoever he will among the rational inhabitants of the earth. Like a skilful mariner at the helm of the ship, he influences and directs our conduct to serve the purposes of his government. The fortuitous actions of men are managed and overruled by God ; the archer draws his bow at a venture, but the arrow is directed by a higher hand. When Joseph's brethren sold him into Egypt, "it was not they that sent him thither, but God." Gen. xlv. 8. The Divine influence extends over the whole universe, from the highest angel to the smallest insect. No second cause, though ever so powerful, can act independently on the first ; the revolution of kingdoms and nations are by a Divine appointment, as appears from the example of Nebuchadnezzar, in our text. The good actions of men are excited and influenced from above, and the evil are permitted and made subservient to wise purposes. "There is a God that judgeth in the earth," whose hand none can stay. Ps. lviii. 11.

2. We are to inquire into God's rectoral government, and to consider him as the sovereign lawgiver and judge.

The laws he has established for the government of mankind.

(1.) God has appointed the moral law, or the light of nature, as a rule of duty to his reasonable creatures. "For the Gentiles which have not the law." Rom. ii. 14, 15. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, and is divided by our Saviour into

these two branches ; “ the love of God, and our neighbour.” Matt. xxii. 37—40. These two capital precepts are obligatory upon all mankind, upon Jews and Gentiles. They are also unchangeable, because founded not only in the will of God, but in the nature of things.

(2.) There are laws of a mixed nature, which, though not evident by the light of reason, yet, when revealed, appear more consonant and agreeable to it, and render it more beautiful and perfect : such are those, “ I say unto you, love your enemies.” Matt. v. 44. And those others, of “ denying ourselves, of taking up our cross, and of suffering death for the name of Christ.” Natural reason, in its highest improvements, did not dictate these.

(3.) There are also positive and ritual laws, which depend entirely upon the will of God, and are obligatory only because he has enjoined them ; such were the rites and ceremonies of the Old Testament, as circumcision, the passover, &c. which had their uses, not from any inherent virtue, but from the appointment of God. Such also are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, in the New Testament, which derive their efficacy, nor from any moral excellency in the elements, but from the institution of Christ : for then we are his friends, “ if we do whatsoever he commands us.” John xv. 14.

(4.) In what manner God has provided for the due observance of his laws. Though they are just and reasonable, and designed for the benefit of mankind, yet such is the depravity of our natures, that it became necessary for him to secure their honour.

1.) By extraordinary rewards and punishments ; for though every law must have a sanction or penalty, as a terror to evil-doers, it is not necessary that rewards should be promised to the obedient. The law that was given to our first parents in paradise, makes no express mention of a reward to their obedience : but as God has, since that time, published to the world divers new laws by his servants the prophets, and by his Son Jesus Christ, he has been graciously pleased to encourage the observation of them by promises of rewards, both in the life that now is and of that which is to come. Those annexed to the law of Moses were chiefly temporal. “ Blessed shalt thou be in the city.” Deut. xxviii. 3. Those of the New Testament are spiritual and heavenly : “ To them who by patient continuance in well-doing.” Rom. ii. 7. “ This is the will of him that hath sent me.” John vi. 40. These extraordinary rewards are not of debt, but of grace. On the other hand, there are threatenings of inconceivable and everlasting punishments to the disobedient, such as “ tribulation and anguish.” Rom. ii. 9.

2.) God has further promised all necessary assistance. “ I will strengthen thee, I will help thee.” “ Ask and ye shall receive.” “ My God shall supply all your need.” Phil. iv. 19. So that we, who of ourselves can do nothing, through the assistance of Christ may do all things.

3.) Besides this, God has promised to subdue our indwelling corruptions, and to check the malice and rage of Satan. The seeds of wickedness in the hearts of men would produce most direful effects in the world, if they were not under a divine restraint ; for from within, “ out of the heart proceed, not only evil thoughts, but murders, adulteries.” Matt. xv. 19. These are the genuine fruits of corrupt nature, which would

throw the world into confusion, if God were not pleased to restrain or overrule them. "I withheld thee," says God to Abimelech, "from sinning against me." Gen. xx. 6. And the Psalmist declares "that the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain." Ps. lxxvi. 10.

4.) God is pleased farther to excite in his people's hearts such good motions and dispositions, as make the ways of religion appear both reasonable and pleasant; for which purpose he not only enlightens their minds and awakens their consciences by his Holy Spirit, but makes them willing in the day of his power. "My speech and my preaching," says the apostle, "was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power." 1 Cor. ii. 4. The like influence is necessary to our perseverance in well-doing.

5.) We are to consider the account to be given of our obedience to the divine laws. As God is our lawgiver, he must be our supreme and primary judge; therefore he is called "the Judge of all the earth;" but we have since been told, by our blessed Saviour, that the Father has committed all judgment to the Son, and therefore he has commanded his apostles and ministers to preach and to testify, that it is he who "is ordained of God to be Judge of the quick and dead." Acts x. 42. The proceedings of this solemn day will be according to the dispensation men have lived under. "As many as have sinned without the law, shall perish without the law." Rom. ii. 12.

Practical remarks.

1. This view of the divine government may lead us to a contemplation of the infinite perfections of that Being who does whatsoever he pleases in both worlds. How immense must he be, who fills all space, and is intimately present with all his creatures!

2. We may learn from hence the nature of the divine government over the rational world; which, though absolute, is nevertheless directed by the other perfections of his nature, and suited to the different capacities of his creatures.

3. The consideration of the divine direction and influence over all human affairs may administer some relief to good men under their present afflictions: "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust." Job v. 6.

4. We may observe from hence, the excellency and perfection of those laws by which God governs his reasonable creatures. "The law of God is perfect." Ps. xix. 7. "As many as walk according to this rule, peace will be upon them, and mercy, and upon the whole Israel of God." Gal. vi. 16.

THE EXCELLENCY AND ADVANTAGES OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION,

WITH THE INVITATIONS AND PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL.

He is the Mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.—Heb. viii. 6.

THIS better covenant, which the apostle *here* commends, is the Christian religion, or the dispensation of the gospel under Jesus Christ, the

Messiah and the Mediator. Now in order to show the superior excellency of the Christian dispensation, it is necessary to take a brief review of all those former dispensations of grace.

The first is that of Adam. No sooner was man fallen from his state of innocency, and had lost all reasonable hopes of happiness according to that constitution, but the goodness of God was manifested in revealing to Adam the covenant or constitution of grace, as it was contained in this obscure promise, "the seed of the woman;" Gen. iii. 15; which, in the language of the New Testament, signifies, that the Saviour, in the fulness of time, should be born of a woman, and should destroy this work of the devil. This covenant was also confirmed to Noah and his sons after the flood, with some farther precepts about the distinctions of meats, and the punishment of murder, and the promise that the earth should be no more destroyed by water.

The same covenant was continued to Abraham, with some clearer promises of the Messiah, or Saviour. "The gospel was preached to Abraham," Gal. iii. 8, together with the addition of a promised inheritance in the land of Canaan, as a type of heaven, and the peculiar precept of circumcision, which was a figure of the mortification of sin.

The same gracious covenant, or gospel, was yet further revealed to Moses, and by him to the nation of Israel, in the wilderness of Sinai. This was called the Levitical, or Mosaical, or the Jewish dispensation: "The gospel was preached to them as well as unto us." Heb. iv. 2. And here the will of God was more explicitly set before them, and their encouragement to repentance. Here also there was a multitude of emblems, or signs and pledges, both of the blessings of God and the duties of man, which are usually called the Jewish ceremonies.

The great apostle, in his epistles to the Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, is often teaching them, that this Sinai covenant, this law of Moses, with all the ceremonies of it, could not give them life; Gal. iii. 21; and it is in this sense chiefly the apostle, in the verses following my text, tells them, "the first covenant was not faultless," *i. e.* was not sufficient to save sinful men: he often warns them against trusting in it for salvation, and assures them, it "was vanishing away," (verses 7 and 13,) and that a new covenant is now introduced; that is, the Christian dispensation, or the gospel in the most spiritual manifestation of it. Now, as Moses was the Mediator of this covenant of Sinai, and Aaron the priest obtained the ministry thereof, so the Son of God, being manifest in the flesh, is that High Priest who hath obtained a more excellent ministry than Aaron, and is the Mediator of this covenant, which is better than that of Moses, and which is established upon better promises.

I. The Christian dispensation, though it be a rich discovery of grace, yet it contains the fairest and fullest representation of the moral law.

The beauties of holiness, which run through this law, shine with a fairer light under the gospel of Christ. The duties of worship, obedience, and submission, we owe to God; the duties of justice, truth, &c. we owe to our neighbour; and those of sobriety, which we owe to ourselves, are set forth more at large in the New Testament. Here the commands of the law of God are represented in their full extent, as they require the obedience of the heart as well as of the life.

II. In the Christian dispensation, the covenant of grace is revealed more perfectly.

Every covenant between God and man, in the most complete sense of the word, implies some engagements on our side, which are appointed duties; and some engagements on God's side, which are promised blessings. Now, in both these respects, the covenant of grace is revealed, in the New Testament, in a much more plain and express manner. The blessings of the covenant of grace are regeneration, pardon, justification, adoption, sanctification, assistance to perform duties, support under troubles, comfort in life and death, and everlasting joy: these are most plainly described. The duties of this covenant are faith, unfeigned repentance towards God, confession of sin, secret prayer, love to God as a father, delight in him, joyful hope in his promised mercy, zeal for his honour, and sincere obedience, arising from a principle of faith and love. All these are more expressly required.

The chief of these things were contained in the former dispensations, particularly the Jewish: but many of them were there veiled under types and figures, and dark shadows; so that the Jews were ready to take up with these shadows instead of the substance.

But now the Christian dispensation sets the covenant of grace and salvation before us, in its own spiritual language, in a clear and distinct light, and without a veil. The vision of grace and glory in the New Testament is written so plain, "that he that runs may read it;" the highway of repentance, faith, and holiness, which leads to eternal life, is laid so open, "that the stranger and wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein."

III. The rites and ceremonies which are superadded to the covenant of grace, in the Christian dispensation of it, are much preferable to those in former times.

1. They are much fewer than the ceremonies of the Jewish state. What a multitude of ceremonies were they encumbered with! What washings and sprinklings—what numerous purifications—what innumerable ceremonies of worship—what frequent journeys! Whereas, in the Christian state, there are but two ceremonies appointed, viz. that of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

2. They are much more easy, and less burdensome and expensive, than those of the former dispensations.

3. They are clearer in their design and manner of representation. When the body is washed with water in baptism, it very clearly represents that our souls must pass through the laver of regeneration. The bread broken, and the wine poured out in the Lord's Supper, distinctly represent the body of Christ broken on the cross for our sins, and his blood poured out as an atoning sacrifice: and the actions of eating and drinking do as evidently hold forth our partaking of the blessings purchased by the blood and death of the Son of God.

IV. The Son of God, who was the real Mediator of the covenant of grace through all former dispensations, has condescended to become the visible Mediator of this dispensation.

He is the Mediator of this better covenant. He began his office of mediation between God and man, indeed, in those early counsels and

transactions with God the Father, before the world was made, which are called the covenant of redemption. But in this last dispensation, he appears visibly and plainly as the one Mediator between God and man, when he discovers himself as the Son of God, and as the man Christ Jesus. John iii. 16. And so St. Paul more expressly speaks in 1 Tim. ii. 5. Moses the mediator of the Jewish covenant, with all his virtues and graces, was not comparable to the Mediator of the new covenant, the Son of God himself, "the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image." Heb. i. 3.

Every thing which we have to do with God by a Mediator, is much more clear and express. Though Jesus were always the Mediator of the covenant of grace, yet the ancients knew so little of him under this express character, that you find neither Abraham, nor David, nor Isaiah, nor those which were most enlightened in divine things, make such use of his name in their addresses to the Father. But if we Christians call upon God, and draw near to him, we have the prevailing name of Christ given us to plead at the throne. "Whatever ye do in word or deed." Col. iii. 17.

V. It is not confined.

That of Moses was confined to one nation only; that of Abraham to one family, and chiefly limited to his son Isaac. But the Christian dispensation is and shall be conveyed through the world, to all the heathen nations, as well as to the Jews, and that by a multitude of messengers.

VI. I might add here some other characters of the Christian dispensation, which the apostle gives it, 2 Cor. iii.

He exalts it above all the religion of the Jews, and especially far above the Sinai covenant. That was, saith he, the ministration of a letter, a dispensation which consisted much in outward forms, and figures, and types; this is the ministration of the Spirit, *i. e.* either of the substance and the things signified in these types, or wherein the Spirit of grace is more eminently poured out. That was written only on tables of stone, this on fleshly tables of the heart. That was a ministration of condemnation and death; this is the ministration of righteousness and life, inasmuch as all the springs of pardon and life, hope and happiness, are set open in the gospel of Christ. 2 Cor. iii. 7—11.

VII. The encouragements.

1. Do examples invite us to our duty, and by a soft and secret influence encourage and lead us on to the performance of it? Such indeed were the names of Abraham and David: but do not all the praises which are due to Abraham and David fall far short of the labours and sufferings, the zeal and patience, the holiness and the love of that divine man, St. Paul? and none of these are to be compared with the more excellent and perfect pattern of men, Jesus the Son of God, who was holy and harmless. Heb. vii. 26.

2. Are the motives of love and gratitude powerful principles to encourage and persuade? Such indeed were the blessings and gifts which God bestowed on men under former dispensations. But what were all those gifts and blessings in comparison of the unspeakable gifts of his own Son, to die as a sacrifice in our stead, which is one of the chief themes and glories of the Christian revelation? The love of God to us, made visible

3. Are the promises and threatenings of God another set of motives to duty? Do not the awful glories and terrors of a future and eternal world work upon all the springs of our activity in a high degree? But the former dispensations had but a few of these. A few bright sentences collected from David, Isaiah, and Daniel, were some of the chief discoveries that we know of in those ancient ages; but in the New Testament the gates of the other world are thrown open; a heaven of happiness, and a hell of misery, are discovered.

But this leads me to the second part of the text; and that is, the excellency of the promises of the new covenant.

St. Paul tells us, this new covenant is established, or constituted, upon better promises.

1. The promises of the New Testament will appear to be much superior to those of the Old, if we consider what was hinted before, that they contain in them such blessings as were scarcely known under the former dispensations.

2. The apostle has taught us to look upon all the promises, as sealed to believers by the blood of the Son of God, and secured to Christians by his resurrection and exaltation. "Because I live, ye shall live also." John xiv. 19.

3. The New Testament confirms all the best promises of the Old, and claims them for itself—new hearts and new spirits. They were all written for our learning. Rom. xv. 4. What an invaluable and everlasting treasure are these exceeding great and precious promises! It is by these the slothful are quickened, the sinking supported—"Be thou faithful unto death." Rev. ii. 10.

Inferences.

1. Though every part of our Bible be sacred and divine, yet the latter part of it is most valuable. The New Testament far exceeds the Old, because it reveals to us this better covenant.

2. What abundant thanks and praises are due to the blessed God, who brought us forth into the world under this last and best dispensation! We are not called to that troublesome and expensive kind of worship, which consisted in the killing and burning of bulls and goats, and the choicest lambs of the flock. We are not obliged to travel three times a year to distant parts of the nation where we dwell, in order to adore our Maker, at one single tabernacle or temple; for in every place that God, who is a spirit, is worshipped now. John iv. 23. We are not forced to spell out the mercies of God by types and dark figures; but we see his overflowing goodness in the person and offices of his beloved Son.

3. Do we enjoy the privilege of knowing this better covenant, and shall any of us content ourselves without a certain interest in the blessings of it? Do we hear of these better promises, and shall we be satisfied without a title to them? Shall we belong to that wretched tribe of despisers? Acts xiii. 41. What double anguish will seize our consciences when the Judge shall pronounce at the last day, "Go, ye cursed!" Matt. xxv. 41.

4. If we Christians live under a better covenant, and enjoy better promises, we must needs reproach ourselves, if we find our faith and obedience shall fall below that of the Jews. Let the name, pattern, and

spirit of the blessed Jesus inspire us with new vigour to follow him, till he shall have brought us to the accomplishment of all these better promises.

OF THE LAW OF GOD.

Wherefore the law is holy, &c.—Rom. vii. 12.

THE word law is variously used, sometimes for a part of the scriptures only, the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses; as when it is mentioned in the division of the scriptures by Christ, Luke xxiv. 44, and along with the Prophets, and as distinct from them, John i. 45; see also chap. viii. 5; sometimes for all the books of the Old Testament, which in general go by the name of law, as does the book of Psalms on that account, as the places quoted out of it, or referred to in it, show; John x. 34; xii. 34; xv. 25; sometimes it signifies the doctrine of the scriptures in general, Ps. xix. 7, and the doctrine of the gospel in particular, Isa. ii. 3; xlii. 4, called in the New Testament the law or doctrine of faith; Rom. iii. 27; and sometimes it signifies the whole body of laws given from God by Moses to the children of Israel, as distinct from the gospel of the grace of God, John i. 17, and which may be distinguished into,

1. The ceremonial law, of which this law was a shadow of good things to come by Christ, of evangelical things, and indeed was no other than the gospel veiled in types and figures.

2. Judicial, which respects the political state, or civil government of the Jews, and consists of statutes and judgments; according to which the judges of Israel determined all causes brought before them. Deut. xvii. 8—11. The government of the Jews was a very particular form of government; it was a theocracy, a government immediately under God: though he be King of the whole world, and Governor among and over the nations of it, yet he was, in a special and peculiar manner, King over Israel.

3. Moral, which lies chiefly in the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, Ex. xx. 3—17, and which our Lord has reduced, even both tables of the law, to two capital ones, love to God, and love to our neighbour; Matt. xxii. 36—40; as the apostle has reduced the commands of the second table to one, that is, love, which he calls the fulfilling of the law. Rom. xiii. 9, 10. And this law, to love God and our neighbour, is binding on every man, and is eternal, and remains invariable and unalterable; and concerning which I shall treat more largely. And consider,

I. The author and giver of this law.

God was the author and maker of it, Moses the giver and minister of it from God. There was a law in being before the time of Moses; or otherwise there would have been no transgression, no imputation of sin, no charge of guilt, nor any punishment inflicted; whereas death, the just demerit of sin, reigned from Adam to Moses. Besides the law given to

Adam, there was the law of nature, inscribed on his heart by his Maker, as the rule of obedience to him, Rom. i. 19, 20; ii. 14, and which is re-inscribed in the hearts of God's people in regeneration, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace. Jer. xxxi. 33. Now the law of Moses, for matter and substance, is the same with the law of nature, though differing in the form of administration; and this was renewed in the times of Moses, that it might be confirmed, and that it might not be forgotten, and be wholly lost out of the minds of men.

II. The epithets, or the properties of it.

1. That it is perfect. "The law of the Lord is perfect," Ps. xix. 7, which is true of the moral law, by which men come to know "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God;" Rom. xii. 2; what it is his will should be done, and what not be done: it takes in the whole duty of men, both to God and man; "for to fear God and keep his commandments." When the apostle John speaks of a new commandment, he means the old commandment to love one another, as he himself explains it, 1 John ii. 7, 8, and which he calls new, because enforced by a new instance and example of Christ's love in dying for his people, and by new motives and arguments taken from the same.

2. It is spiritual. "We know that the law is spiritual," says the apostle, Rom. vii. 14, which is to be understood of the moral law; for as for the ceremonial law, that is called the law of a carnal commandment, and is said to stand in carnal ordinances. Heb. vii. 16; ix. 10. The law reaches to the thoughts and intents of the heart, and the affections of the mind, and forbids and checks all irregular and inordinate motions in it, and the lusts of it. The assistance of the Spirit of God is necessary to the observance of it; and God in covenant has promised his people, that he "will put his spirit within them, and cause them to walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments, and do them." Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

3. The law is holy, and the commandment holy; it comes from a holy God, from whom nothing unholy can proceed; for holiness is his nature, and the law is a transcript of his holy will; the matter of it, or what it requires, is holy; even sanctification of the heart and life: and it directs to live holily, soberly, &c.

4. It is also just. There are no laws so righteous as the laws of God: "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." Deut. iv. 8; Ps. xix. 9. It is impartial unto all, and requires the same of one as of another, and renders to every man according to his works; it is just in condemning wicked men, and in justifying those that believe in Jesus.

5. The law is good; the Author of it is good only, essentially, originally good; from whom every good and perfect gift comes. The law is materially good, it is morally good, it is pleasantly good, to a regenerate man, who, as the apostle, delights in the law of God after the inner man, and loves it, as David did, and meditates on it, as every good man does. Rom. vii. 22. Ps. cxix. 97; i. 2. And it is profitably good: not to God, Luke xvii. 10, but to men, their fellow-creatures and fellow-Christians, to whom they are serviceable by their good works, Tit. iii. 8, and also to themselves; for though not *for*, yet "*in* keeping the commands there is great reward," Ps. xix. 11; cxix. 165, as peace of conscience. "The law is good, if a man use it lawfully." 1 Tim. i. 8.

III. The uses of the law both to sinners and saints.

1. To sinners.

(1.) To convince of sin. Sin is a transgression of the law, by which it is known that it is sin. "By the law is the knowledge of sin," not only of gross actual sins, but of the inward lusts of the mind: "I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Rom. iii. 20; vii. 7.

(2.) To restrain from sin. Of this use are the laws of men; hence civil magistrates are terrors to evil doers: so the law, by its menaces, deters men from sin.

(3.) To condemn and punish for sin. For sinners it is made, and against them it lies, to their condemnation, unless justified in Christ. 1 Tim. i. 9, 10. It accuses of sin, charges with it, brings evidence of it; stops the sinner's mouth from pleading in his own cause, pronounces guilty before God, and curses and condemns: "It is the ministration of condemnation and death." 2 Cor. iii. 9.

1. It is of use to saints and true believers in Christ.

(1.) To point out the will of God unto them. What is to be done by them, and what to be avoided; to inform them of, and urge them to their duty, both towards God and man.

(2.) To be a rule of life and conversation to them. Not a rule to obtain life, but to live according to; to direct their steps. "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light." Prov. vi. 23. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet." Ps. cxix. 105.

(3.) It is as a glass, in which a believer, by the light of the Spirit of God, may see his own face, what manner of man he is; how far short of perfection he is in himself. "I have seen an end of all perfection," &c. Ps. cxix. 96. Hence,

(4.) They are led to prize the righteousness of Christ, since that is perfectly agreeable to the holy law of God; wherefore, "they desire to be found in Christ, not having on their own righteousness." Phil. iii. 9.

IV. The law of God continues under the present dispensation for the said uses.

Christ came not to destroy it, and loosen men's obligations to it, but to fulfil it; nor is the law made null and void by faith.

1. It does not continue as a covenant of works; and, indeed, it was not delivered to the children of Israel as such, strictly and properly speaking, only in a typical sense.

2. Nor does it continue as to the form of administration of it by Moses; it is now no longer in his hands, nor to be considered as such.

3. It continues not as a terrifying law to believers, "who are not come to mount Sinai, but they are come to mount Sion." Heb. xii. 22. Nor are they awed and urged by its curses to an observance of it; but are constrained by the love of Christ. 2 Cor. v. 14.

4. Nor is it a cursing and condemning law to the saints; for "Christ has redeemed them from the curse of the law." Gal. iii. 13.

5. Yet it continues as a rule of walk and conversation to them, and is to be regarded by them as in the hands of Christ, their king and law-giver. Believers, though freed from the law, in the sense before declared, yet are "not without a law to God, but under the law to Christ." 1 Cor. ix. 21.

OF THE GOSPEL.

The gospel of the grace of God.—Acts xx. 24.

THERE was gospel in the former dispensation, though called the legal dispensation ; it was preached to Adam, to Abraham, and by Isaiah and other prophets. Yet there is a clearer revelation and ministration of it under the present dispensation ; as the law was, by the ministration of Moses, grace and truth ; the word of grace and truth, the gospel, came by Jesus Christ, in a clearer and fuller manner than it had been made known before. John i. 17. Concerning which, the following things may be noted :

I. The name and signification of it.

The Greek word used for it signifies a good message, good news, glad tidings ; the gospel is a message of good news from heaven, the far country, to sinners here on earth : such was the gospel Christ was anointed to preach ; Luke iv. 18, compared with Isa. lxi. 1 ; and which his ministers bring, “ whose feet are beautiful upon the mountains.” Isa. lii. 7. Acts xiii. 32, 33. The Hebrew words used for the gospel, and the preaching of it, signifies good tidings also ; and it is observed, by some, to have the signification of flesh in it, which has led them to think of the incarnation of Christ ; which is undoubtedly, good news to the children of men, and a considerable branch of the gospel of Christ : and what has given Isaiah the character of an evangelical prophet, as if then present in his time. “ To us a child is born ;” Isa. ix. 6 ; see chap. vii. 14 : and when the angel proclaimed the birth of Christ to the shepherds, he is said “ to bring good tidings.” Luke ii. 10, 11. And this is one principal part of the gospel, the great mystery of godliness, “ God manifest in the flesh.” 1 Tim. iii. 16. Our English word *gospel* is of Saxon derivation ; in which language, *spel* signifies speech : and so gospel is either *good speech*, which carries in it the same idea with the Greek and Hebrew words, or God’s speech, which he has spoken by his Son, by his prophets, and by his ministers.

This word is variously used ; sometimes it is put for the history of Christ’s birth, life, and actions ; such are the gospels according to Matthew, Mark, &c. Mark begins his history thus : “ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus ;” Mark i. 1 ; and Luke calls his gospel, “ The former treatise he had made, of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach ;” Acts i. 1 ; and hence these four writers are commonly called evangelists. Sometimes the gospel is to be taken in a large sense, as including the word and ordinances ; Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Mark xvi. 15, 16 ; and sometimes strictly, for the doctrine of peace, pardon, &c. by Christ : hence gospel ministers, who bring good tidings of good, are said to publish peace, salvation, &c. Isa. lii. 7 ; the sum of which is expressed by the apostle, when he says, “ This is a faithful saying,” &c. 1 Tim. i. 15. Hence,

1. The gospel is called the gospel of salvation, the word of salvation, and salvation itself, Eph. i. 13. Acts xiii. 26 ; xxviii. 28, because it gives an account of Christ, the author of salvation ; of his appointment

to it; of his mission, and coming into the world to affect it; and of his actual performance of it; of his being the able, willing, and only Saviour; and of the salvation itself, as great and glorious, perfect and complete, spiritual and everlasting; and because it describes also the persons that share in it, sinners, sensible sinners, &c. Mark xvi. 16. Acts xvi. 30, 31; and because it is not only the means of revealing, but of applying salvation; for it is, to them that believe, "the power of God unto salvation." Rom. i. 16.

2. The gospel of the grace of God, Acts xx. 24, because the several doctrines of it are doctrines of grace, or which exhibit blessings as flowing from the grace of God; redemption, pardon, &c.

3. The gospel of peace, the word of reconciliation, Eph. vi. 15. 2 Cor. v. 18. Acts x. 36, because it relates the steps taken in council and covenant, to form the scheme of man's peace with God, to lay the foundation of it, and to bring it about; Zech. vi. 13. Isa. liv. 10; and also relates the actual making of it; by whom, and by what means. Eph. ii. 14. Isa. liii. 5. Col. i. 20. Rom. v. 10.

4. The gospel of the kingdom, Matt. iv. 23, because it treats both of the kingdom of grace here, showing wherein it lies; and of the kingdom of glory hereafter, pointing out the proper meetness for it. John iii. 5. Matt. v. 20. Luke xii. 32.

II. The author and origin of the gospel.

1. It is not of man, a device and invention of men. "I neither received it of men." Gal. i. 11, 12. It is not discoverable by the light of reason. Matt. xvi. 16, 17. Hence the gospel is frequently called, "a mystery:" the "wisdom of God in a mystery; the hidden wisdom;" and the doctrines of it, "the mysteries of the kingdom." Matt. xiii. 11.

2. The gospel is from heaven. It is good news from a far country; the gospel is, with the Holy Ghost, sent down from heaven: and Christ that spoke it, is He that speaketh from heaven. The question put concerning the baptism of John, "Whence was it, from heaven, or of men?" may be put in concerning the gospel, and answered as that; that is, from heaven, and not of man 1 Pet. i. 12. Heb. xii. 25. Matt. xxi. 25. It comes also from God the Father, and is, therefore, called "the gospel of God." Rom. i. 1—3. It comes also from Christ, the Son of God, and is called "the gospel of his Son, the gospel of Christ, the word of Christ, and the testimony of Christ, and the testimony of our Lord," Rom. i. 9, 16. 2 Tim. i. 8, of which Christ is the subject, sum and substance, as well as the author. Hence the apostle says, he received it "by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Gal. i. 12. It may be said, likewise, to come from the Holy Spirit of God, the inditer of the scriptures, wherein it lies, "who searches the deep things of it, and reveals them to men."

III. The effect of the gospel, when attended with the power and Spirit of God.

1. The regeneration of men, who are said, "to be born again by the word of God," and to be "begotten again with the word of truth." 1 Pet. i. 23; James i. 18. Hence ministers of the gospel are represented as spiritual fathers. 1 Cor. iv. 15.

2. As, in regeneration, souls are quickened by the Spirit and grace of

God, this is ascribed to the gospel as an instrument. Hence it is called, "the Spirit which giveth life," and said to be "the savour of life unto life." 2 Cor. ii. 16, and iii. 6.

3. It is frequently spoken of as a light, a great light, a glorious light; and so is, in the hands of the Spirit, a means of enlightening the dark minds of men into mysteries of grace. "The entrance of thy word giveth light." Ps. cxix. 130. It is a glass in which the glory of Christ, and of the riches of his grace, may be seen.

4. By it faith in Christ comes, and is ingenerated in the heart by the Spirit of God attending it. Hence, among other reasons, it is called "the word of faith." Rom. x. 8, 17.

5. When faith is wrought in the soul, the righteousness of Christ is revealed unto it in the gospel, and not at first believing only; it is revealed therein "from faith to faith." Rom. i. 17. Hence it is called "the word of righteousness, and the ministration of righteousness." Heb. v. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 6, 9.

6. It affords spiritual food, and is the mean of feeding and nourishing souls unto everlasting life. It has in it milk for babes and meat for strong men; and when it is found by faith, it is eaten by it with pleasure, and fills with spiritual joy. 1 Tim. iv. 6; vi. 3. Heb. v. 13, 14. Jer. xv. 16. Hence,

7. Is another effect, it yields much spiritual peace, joy, &c. The doctrines of it are calculated for such a purpose; it is glad tidings of good things, as of peace and pardon. When Philip preached Christ and his gospel in Samaria, "there was great joy in that city." Acts viii. 5—8. All this must be understood of the gospel, not as producing these effects of itself, but as it comes, "not in word only, but with power." 1 Thess. i. 5—8. Ps. cx. 2. Rom. i. 16.

IV. The properties of the gospel.

1. It is but one; there is another, as the apostle says. Gal. i. 6, 7. The same gospel which was in the beginning, and will be to the end, of the world; the same under the Old Testament as under the New; the subject of it, Christ and salvation by him; the doctrines of it, of justification, remission of sins, &c. the same, only now more clearly revealed. For it is true of the gospel, what is said of Christ, it is "the same yesterday." Heb. xiii. 8.

2. It is called from the objects of it, the gospel of the circumcision, and the gospel of the uncircumcision. Gal. ii. 7. Not that the gospel of the one is different from that of the other; it is the same gospel, only dispensed to different persons; the circumcised Jews, and uncircumcised Gentiles.

3. It is a glorious gospel; so it is called, 2 Cor. iv. 4. 1 Tim. i. 11. It has a glory in exceeding that of the law, and the dispensation of it, 2 Cor. iii. 11, for the clearness, fulness, suitableness of its doctrines to the state and condition of men; and in which the glory of the person of Christ, his offices, and of the blessings of grace that come by him, is held forth in great splendour and brightness.

4. It is an everlasting gospel; which is the epithet given it, Rev. xiv.

6. It was ordained in the council and covenant of God before the world was, of which it is a transcript, and so was from everlasting; "but the word of the Lord endureth for ever." 1 Pet. i. 25.

OF THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST.

God manifested in the flesh.—1 Tim. iii. 16.

THE incarnation of Christ is a most extraordinary and amazing affair; it is wonderful, indeed, that the eternal Son of God should become man; that he should be born of a pure virgin, without any concern of man in it; that this should be brought about by the power of the Holy Ghost, in a way unseen, imperceptible and unknown, signified by his overshadowing; and all this in order to effect the most wonderful work that ever was done in the world, the redemption and salvation of men: it is a most mysterious thing, incomprehensible by men, and not to be accounted for upon the principles of natural reason; and is only to be believed and embraced upon the credit of divine revelation, to which it solely belongs.

I. The subject of the incarnation, or the Divine person that became incarnate.

The evangelist John says it was the Word, the essential Word of God. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," John i. 14, and he is said to be the "Word with God;" that is, with God the Father; and, therefore, must be distinct from him. Rev. xix. 13. Acts xx. 32. John i. 1. Wherever we read of any visible appearance of a Divine person in the Old Testament, it is always to be understood, not of the first, but of the second person. The Father prepared a body, a human nature in his purpose, council, and covenant, and not for himself, even for his Son, as he acknowledges: "A body hast thou prepared me." Heb. x. 5. That Divine person who came in the flesh, or became incarnate, is always distinguished from the Father, as being sent by him; "God sending his own Son." Rom. viii. 3. "God sent forth his Son," Gal. iv. 4, that is, God the Father, in both passages; as appears from the relation of the person to him, sent in the flesh, his Son. If the Father had been incarnate, he must have suffered and died; for that is the end of the incarnation, that the person incarnate might obey, suffer, and die, in the room of sinners; so Christ suffered in the flesh, and was put to death in the flesh. Nor is it the Holy Spirit that became incarnate, for the same reasons that the Father cannot be thought to be so; and besides, he had a peculiar hand and a special agency, in the formation of the human nature, and in its conception and birth: when Joseph and Mary were espoused, before they came together, "she was found with child of the Holy Ghost;" and Joseph was told, in order to encourage him to take her to wife, that what was "conceived in her was of the Holy Ghost;" and, therefore, he himself was not incarnate. See Luke i. 35. Matt. i. 18—20. It remains that it is the second person, the Son of God, who is meant by "the Word that was made flesh," or became incarnate: and, indeed, it is explained of him in the same passage; for it follows: "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father." John i. 14. When this mystery of the incarnation is expressed by the phrase, "God manifest in the flesh:" not God the Father, nor the Holy Ghost, but God the Son is meant, as it is explained, for "this purpose the Son of God was manifested." 1 John iii. 8.

II. To observe in what sense the Word, or Son of God was made flesh.

John i. 14. Heb. ii. 14. 1 John iv. 2, 3. 1 Tim. iii. 16; signify, that he who is truly God, really became man, or assumed the whole human nature, as will be seen presently, in union with his Divine person.

What is meant by *flesh*, in the phrases and passages referred to, is a whole individual of human nature, consisting of soul and body: as when it is said, "there shall no flesh living be justified in his sight;" Rom. iii. 20; and again, "that no flesh shall glory in his presence," 1 Cor. i. 29, with many other passages; see Gen. vi. 12. Luke iii. 6; for such acts as being justified and glorying, can never be said of the flesh nor body, abstractedly considered; but of the whole man, or of individuals of human nature, consisting of soul and body; and in this sense are we to understand it, when it is used of the incarnation of the Son of God, who took upon him the whole nature of man.

1. He took a true body, not a mere phantom, spectre or apparition, the appearance of a body, and not a real one. It is certain that Christ partook of the same flesh and blood as his children; and therefore if theirs be real, his must be so. Likewise, his body is called "the body of his flesh," his fleshly body, Col. i. 22, to distinguish it from the token of his body in the supper; and from his mystical and spiritual body, the church: all his actions, and what is said of him, from his birth to his death, and in it, and after it, show it was a true body that he assumed. The very infirmities that attended him, though sinless, were proofs of his body being a true and real one; such as his fatigue and weariness in travelling, John iv. 6, his tears at the grave of Lazarus, and over Jerusalem, and his sweat in the garden. John xi. 35. Luke xix. 41; xxii. 44. In short, it was through weakness of the flesh that he was crucified; which was not in appearance, but in reality.

2. Christ assumed a reasonable soul, with his true body, which made up the nature he took upon him, and are included in the flesh he was made. Christ asserts that he had a soul, and which, he says, was exceeding sorrowful: and which was an immaterial and immortal spirit; and which, when his body died, and was separated from it, he commended into the hands of his Divine Father. Matt. xxvi. 38. Luke xxiii. 46.

3. In what sense the Word, or Son of God, was made flesh, and so became incarnate.

The Word could not be made at all, that is, created, since he is the maker and creator of all things; and therefore he himself could not be made, nor created. But as other Scriptures explain it, God the Word, or Son, was made and became "manifest in the flesh;" the Son that was in the bosom of the Father, the Word of life, that was with him from all eternity, was manifested in the flesh in time to the sons of men; and that in order to take away sin and destroy the works of the devil. 1 John i. 2, and iii. 5, 8.

III. The causes of the incarnation.

1. The efficient causes of it, God, Father, Son, and Spirit. The Father prepared a body for the Son in his purpose, and proposed it to him in council and covenant to assume it; and he sent him forth in the

fulness of time. Heb. x. 5. Gal. iv. 4. Rom. viii. 3. The Son having agreed to it, being sent, came in the flesh, by the assumption of it; "he took unto him the form of a servant." Heb. ii. 14, 16. Phil. ii. 7, 8. The Holy Ghost had a very great concern in this affair; for that which was conceived in the Virgin was of the Holy Ghost. Matt. i. 20. Now, though all the three persons in the Deity had a hand in the wondrous incarnation, yet only one of them became incarnate; only the Son assumed the human nature. Some have illustrated this by three virgins concerned in working a garment, when only one of them puts it on and wears it.

2. The moving cause of the incarnation of Christ is the love of the Father, and of the Son, to mankind. "God so loved the world; herein is love, that God sent." John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 9, 10. And such was the love and condescending grace of the Son, that though he were in the form of God, of the same nature with him. Phil. ii. 6—9. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

3. The final cause, or for whose sake, and for what the Son of God became incarnate. It was for the sake of lost sinners: "To us," or for us, for our sakes, "a child is born, a Son is given." See Isa. ix. 6. Luke ii. 10, 11. Matt. i. 21.

IV. The parts of the incarnation are next to be considered, conception and nativity.

1. Conception. This is a most wonderful, abstruse, and mysterious affair, and which to speak of is very difficult.

(1.) This conception was by a virgin: "Behold, a virgin." This was a new thing, unheard of, and astonishing, which God created in the earth, in the lower parts of the earth, in the Virgin's womb: a woman compassed or conceived a man, without the knowledge of man. Isa. vii. 14. Jer. xxxi. 22. This was not natural, but supernatural.

(2.) This conception was through the power and influence of the Holy Ghost overshadowing the Virgin.

(3.) It was a nature, not a person, that Christ assumed so early as at its conception; it is called the "Holy thing," and not a person. The seed of Abraham; the form and fashion of a man, that is, the nature of man; as the form of God, in the same passage signifies the nature of God. See Luke i. 35. Heb. ii. 16. Phil. ii. 6—8.

2. Nativity.

(1.) Of whom born.

1.) Of a virgin: "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son." See Matt. i. 18—23.

2.) Christ was born of a virgin, of the house of David, as in Luke i. 27; for the phrase, "of the house of David," is equally true of the Virgin as of Joseph, and may be connected with her. Acts xiii. 23. Rev. xxii. 16.

3.) He was born of a virgin, of the tribe of Judah; as she must be, since she was of the house of David, which was of that tribe. Heb. vii. 14.

(2.) The place of his birth was Bethlehem, according to the prophecy in Micah v. 2. See Matt. ii. 4—6. John vii. 42.

(3.) The time of his birth was as it was fixed in prophecy; before the

sceptre, or civil government, departed from Judah. Herod was king in Judea when he was born, before the second temple was destroyed; for he often went into it, and taught in it; and it was at the time pointed at in Daniel's weeks. See Gen. xlix. 10. Mal. iii. 1. Hag. ii. 6, 7, 9. Dan. ix. 24, &c.

V. The ends of Christ's incarnation are many; there is a cluster of them in the song of the angels. Luke ii. 14.

1. One end of Christ's incarnation was, to show forth the glory of God in it. The glory of his grace, kindness and goodness to men, in the mission of his Son in this way; the glory of his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise of it; the glory of his power, in the miraculous production of Christ's human nature; and the glory of his wisdom, in bringing it into the world in such a manner as to be free from sin, and so fit for the purpose for which it was designed.

2. To make peace with God for men on earth; to make reconciliation for sin, was the work appointed him in covenant; and to do this was the reason of his being made in all things like unto his brethren; and make peace by the blood of his cross. Eph. ii. 13—17.

3. That men might receive the fruit of God's good will and favour towards them; even all the blessings of grace. Rom. v. 1, 2.

4. Particularly, Christ became man that he might be our Goel, our near kinsman, and might appear to have a right to redeem us; and he was, in the fulness of time, made of a woman, to redeem men from the law, its curse and condemnation, &c. Gal. iii. 13.

5. Christ became man, that he might be a Mediator between God and men: and, the better to perform several parts of his office as such, he took upon him the nature of man, that he might have something to offer, as a priest, to be a sacrifice for sin, and make a satisfaction for it in that nature that sinned; and be a prophet like unto Moses. Deut. xviii. 15.

CHRIST'S PERSONAL MINISTRY,

MIRACLES, AND PROPHETIC OFFICE.

He hath declared him.—John i. 18.

THE verse, of which these words are the close, is part of John the Baptist's testimony concerning our Lord; it contains three propositions. "No man hath seen God at any time." Neither Moses, nor any other of the prophets, hath ever seen God as he is. "The only begotten Son is in the bosom of his Father." He, as the eternal, only begotten Son of the Father, is, and ever was, intimately present with him; he knows him as he is. "He hath declared him." He, as the great Prophet of the church, has made such discoveries of God, as never were made before, and has given us a plain and complete revelation of his mind and will in all things necessary to salvation.

I. Consider Christ's ministry.

1. The contents of his ministry.

The principal subject of it was, that he, the promised Messiah, was come to set up his kingdom in the world. "He came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God." Mark i. 14, 15.

In pursuit of this design, he set himself against the human traditions, the hypocrisy and superstition; explained and vindicated the moral law. He introduced the everlasting gospel as the last dispensation. "The Spirit of the Lord," said he, "is upon me." Luke iv. 18—21.

He declared God's nature and perfections, authority and government; opened the eternal counsels of his will, for the salvation of lost sinners; displayed the riches of his free and sovereign grace, and proclaimed the wonders of his love. He intimated the saving design of his incarnation, life, obedience, sufferings, and death; cleared up the spiritual nature of his kingdom; insisted on the necessity of regeneration and repentance, &c. Luke xiii. 3. John iii. 3.

He instructed his disciples in the great doctrines of mortification to this world, and heavenly-mindedness; of self-denial, humility, and Christian contentment; of brotherly love, meekness, patience, &c.

He delivered various prophecies of things to come, concerning his own death, resurrection, ascension to heaven, intercession, and exaltation; the effusion of his Spirit; the publication and success of his gospel among the gentiles; the infidelity and rejection of the Jews; the destruction of Jerusalem; his coming to raise the dead, to judge the world. To all this he added the doctrine of the sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, as the ordinances of his kingdom, the seals of God's covenant; and the visible badges of discipleship to him.

2. The manner of Christ's fulfilling his ministry.

"Never man spake like this man;" John vii. 46; the officers themselves being judges, who came to apprehend him; and the common people could not but observe, that he "taught like one having authority," and could not but "wonder at the gracious words." He spake with the majesty and authority of a God; not like the prophets of old, with a "Thus saith the Lord," but with a "Verily, verily, I say unto you:" John iii. 3: and yet he did not seek his own glory, nor aim at ostentation and applause.

Zeal for the glory of God, detestation of all iniquity, and good-will to men, breathed through all his holy ministrations. With what strength and evidence did he support his Father's honour, and confute the cavils of his adversaries! With what undaunted courage did he reprove the vices and errors of the age, never fearing the faces of men! With what admirable skill did he point or soften his reproofs, as the occasion of things required! With what compassion, condescension, and meekness, did he mourn over his obstinate hearers, and "grieve at the hardness of their hearts!" Matt. xxiii. 37. Mark iii. 5.

How tenderly did he expostulate with sinners of all ranks and degrees! How graciously did he invite and encourage the weary and heavy-laden! "The bruised reed he did not break." Matt. xii. 20. "He gathered the lambs with his arms." Isa. xl. 11. And he had "the tongue of the learned." Isa. l. 4.

"The words he spake were spirit and life." John vi. 63. He could add a quickening virtue and commanding energy to them; hence, when

he said to one and another, "Follow me," immediately they left all and followed him. And as soon as he spoke to Nathaniel, the woman of Samaria, and Zaccheus; the first said, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God." John i. 49. The second said, "Come see a man which told me all things that ever I did;" chap. iv. 29; and the third, "Make haste and come down." Luke xix. 5, 6.

3. The credentials of Christ's ministry.

Among these we might reckon the exact accomplishment of many remarkable types and ancient prophecies in him; his miraculous birth subsequent to that of John the Baptist, his forerunner; the extraordinary star that appeared to the wise men of the East; the glory of the Lord that shone round about the shepherds in the field, and the attestation of the heavenly host concerning him; the visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon him at his baptism; and his Father's public testimony to him, "This is my beloved Son." Matt. iii. 16, 17.

(1.) His ministry appeared to be divine by the miracles he wrought, whilst he was employed in it.

These were innumerable, and of various kinds, and not done in a corner; but before the learned, friends and enemies. "He healed all manner of diseases, opened the eyes of the blind, unstopped the ears of the deaf, loosed the tongues of the dumb, cured cripples, cast out devils, and raised the dead." Matt. iv. 23.

(2.) At the close, &c. by miracles.

Surprising signs and wonders were seen at his death; all nature seemed to be flung into confusion. "The sun was darkened at noon-day; the veil of the temple was rent in twain." Luke xxiii. 45. Matt. xxvii. 45—51. And he rose again from the dead on the third day, according to his own prediction, John ii. 19—21. This great event was attended with the "resurrection of many bodies of saints," Matt. xxvii. 52, 53, and with the testimony of angels, saying, "He is not here." Luke xxiv. 6. And when he had "shown himself alive to his disciples," Acts i. 3—11, he ascended up to heaven in their sight, and ten days afterwards shed down his Spirit abundantly upon them, according to his promise. Acts ii. 1—4.

II. Take a more comprehensive view of Christ's prophetic office.

1. Christ teaches by the ministry of inspired men.

During the time of his personal ministry, he spake the word to his auditors as they were able to hear it. Mark iv. 33. And he said to his own disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you." John xvi. 12. He promised that, upon his departure, he would send his Spirit: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come." John xvi. 13, 14.

And by this Spirit "he brought all things to their remembrance." John xiv. 26. He also revealed new doctrines to them, and "showed them things to come." Acts iii. 18. "He gave them the Spirit of power." 2 Tim. i. 7. It was likewise under his inspiration and influence that they committed so much of the gospel revelation to writing. They therein "declared the testimony of God." 1 Cor. ii. 1—13.

2. He teaches by the ministry of others, who are not inspired.

As, "when he ascended up on high, he gave apostles, prophets, and evangelists," which were extraordinary officers, endued with miracu-

lous gifts; so he gave pastors and teachers, to be standing officers in the church, for the "perfecting of the saints." Eph. iv. 1, 11—13. And his promise to be with his servants always, Matt. xxviii. 20, looks forward to the ministers of the gospel till time shall be no more.

3. He teaches by an internal illumination, by means of all these external teachings.

By his external teachings he takes off the veil from our hearts, or removes their natural depravity and prejudices. This internal illumination teaches us to profit: there is something efficacious in it for every man. John vi. 45. But without this internal work upon the heart all external revelations would be ineffectual, as to any saving purpose: "Who hath believed our report?" Isa. liii. 1. 1 Cor. ii. 12—14.

Our Lord Jesus, in the discharge of his prophetic office, undertakes the work of opening the heart, as he did the heart of Lydia. Acts xvi. 14. He, by his Spirit, "convinces the world of sin." John xvi. 8. Hence the apostle John says, "The Son of God is come." 1 John v. 20. And "ye have an unction from the Holy One." 1 John ii. 20.

To conclude.

1. This shows the excellence and necessity of Christ's teachings.

With what light and authority, condescension, grace, and efficacy does he teach us the way to pardon, peace, &c.

O, how thankful should we be for this great Prophet of the church! "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel." Luke i. 68—79.

2. The danger of refusing to hearken to this Divine Teacher.

"For him," says God, "shall ye hear in all things." Acts iii. 22, 23. O, solemn injunction, and, O, dreadful ruin, to such as turn a deaf ear to him! "How shall we escape?" Heb. ii. 3. "See, then, that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Chap. xii. 25.

THE

SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST.

For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.—1 Pet. iii. 18.

THE Son of God came into the world not only to be a prophet, but to sustain and execute the office of a priest; he suffered not merely to seal the truth of his doctrine with his blood, but to make atonement for sin. This is an article of great importance in Christianity. Peter mentions it in this place, as an argument to induce the followers of Jesus Christ to bear with patience the persecutions to which they might be exposed: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins," &c. We may observe, in these words,

I. That the sufferings of Christ are asserted. "Christ hath suffered."

"He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Isa. liii. 3. How great, how manifold were the evils which he sustained, no tongue can express, nor heart conceive. He suffered in his reputation; the vilest aspersions were cast upon him; but his enemies were not satisfied

with the persecution of tongues, they laid violent hands upon him. The scripture speaks of his submission "to the death of the cross," as a very remarkable instance of his obedience and humility. Phil. ii. 8. "He humbled himself:" uncommon shame attended this; but "he endured the cross." Heb. xii. 2. The insults of men, and the assaults of devils, did not affect him so much as his Father's forsaking him. "Jesus cried with a loud voice." Matt. xxvii. 46. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him." Isa. liii. 10. Could the view of what he was to suffer from creatures cause him to say, "his soul was exceeding sorrowful?" Matt. xxvi. 38. Could this produce "sweat like drops of blood?" Luke xxii. 44. Such anguish, as was hereby expressed, may reasonably be supposed to proceed from a higher cause. Christ suffered from the immediate hand of God. The trouble wherewith his heart was filled was caused by the sword of divine vengeance. Zech. xiii. 7.

II. The meritorious cause of Christ's suffering. He "suffered for sins."

Sin alone is provoking to God; this is the only object of his anger. "Who his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree." 1 Pet. ii. 24. Our Lord Jesus had indeed no sin of his own, "but he was made to be sin for us." 2 Cor. v. 21. "He bore our griefs; he was wounded for our transgressions." Isa. liii. 4—6. Thus the spirit of prophecy spake concerning the sufferings of Christ, and the language of the New Testament is conformable hereto. "What the law could not do." Rom. viii. 3. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law." Gal. iii. 13. The scripture expressly speaks of his "soul being made an offering for sin." Isa. liii. 10.

III. A material circumstance relating to the sufferings of Christ taken notice of: "Christ hath once suffered."

Christ suffering but once for sins, proves the all-sufficient and perpetual efficacy of his sacrifice to take away sin. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews argues the weakness and insufficiency of the Levitical sacrifices, from their frequent repetition. Chap. x. 1—3. "The law having a shadow of good things to come." On the other hand, he evinces the perfect virtue of the sacrifice of Christ to expiate our guilt, by the consideration of its being but once offered. "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Christ once for all." Ver. 10, 12—14. Can we entertain too high and honourable thoughts of him, whose blood, though but once shed, was effectual to obtain eternal redemption for us?

IV. The opposite characters of Christ, and of those for whom he suffered: "the just for the unjust."

The character of the just is given in this place unto Christ, to guard against a mistake, which might be occasioned by his being said to "suffer for sins;" lest any should imagine, that he suffered for sins committed by himself, he is styled "the Just." 1 Pet. iii. 18. "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." And indeed this was necessary, to render his sufferings for our sins meritorious. The apostle plainly intimates, that if Christ had sins of his own, which required an offering to be made for them, his sacrifice would have been ineffectual. "Such an high-priest became us." Heb. vii. 26, 27.

Those for whom Christ suffered are the unjust. All the children of

Adam, while they dwell here on earth, may apply this character to themselves; there is none righteous. All the world is become guilty before God. By the disobedience of our common head, we were all made sinners. Rom. v. 19.

V. The design of Christ's sufferings; "that he might bring us to God."

The ends of Christ's sufferings are various.

1. He suffered that he might set us an example of patience and resignation under the troubles of this life. "Forasmuch then." 1 Pet. iv. 1.

2. To teach us self-denial. The crucifixion of Christ had this effect upon Paul: "God forbid that I should glory." Gal. vi. 14.

3. That he might exercise tender compassion towards us. "Wherefore in all things it behoved him." Heb. ii. 17. But the great end of his suffering for sins, "the just for the unjust, was to bring us unto God." 1 Pet. iii. 18. This plainly supposes that our sins had alienated us from God; had made a separation betwixt him and us: now, Christ suffered for our sins, that we might be brought back.

(1.) That we might be brought into a state of peace with God. "God did set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation." Rom. iii. 25, 26.

Under the law almost all things were purged with blood; "and without shedding of blood there is no remission." Heb. ix. 22. So that all true Christians may boldly say, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died:" seeing he has "made peace by the blood of his cross." "Ye who sometimes were afar off." Eph. ii. 13, 14.

(2.) That he might bring them to God by conversion. The scripture represents sin as a part of the departure from God. It is a part of the character which is given all mankind, that "they are gone out of the way." Rom. iii. 12. By giving his life a ransom for us, he has purchased the Spirit, by whom we are freed from the dominion of our sins: therefore are we said to be redeemed from our vain conversation by his precious blood. The grace which enables us to turn unto God, and so walk with him, he communicates to us, as he is the God of peace. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly." 1 Thess. v. 23. "Now the God of peace." Heb. xiii. 20.

(3.) That we might have a freedom of access unto God.

The children of Israel, when they contracted legal uncleanness, were not admitted into the sanctuary till they were purified by the blood of those sacrifices which the law appointed. This appointment prefigured that liberty to draw nigh to God, which is procured for us. "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean." Heb. ix. 13, 14. How unfit are such polluted creatures as we are, to appear before a Being of spotless purity! But "the blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin;" therefore Christians are said to have "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." Heb. x. 19—22. "In him we have boldness." Eph. iii. 12.

(4.) That he might bring us into the glorious presence of God in heaven. Herein lies the consummation of our happiness; it is in order to prepare us for this felicity, that we are brought unto God by conversion in this life: and that we have a liberty of access unto him. But would it not have been a disparagement to the righteous constitution of God, which we had violated, to admit us to such an honourable and

blessed state, without expressing his abhorrence of our trespasses? This was abundantly done by Christ's suffering for sin; therefore it is said "that it became him." Heb. ii. 10. Heaven is styled "the purchased possession." Eph. i. 14. Christ hath made a purchase of this for us, with the inestimable price of his blood: "He died for us, that we should live together with him" in heaven. "He gave himself for his church," Eph. v. 25—27, or as it is expressed, "that he might present it faultless." Jude 24.

Application.

1. Our hearts should be greatly affected with the representation which has been made unto us of the love of Christ. How amazing was his grace in suffering for the unjust! "He commended his love towards us."

2. How should we hate and abominate sin! Was this the occasion of so much sorrow to our dear Redeemer, and shall we indulge ourselves in it?

3. Let us draw nigh to God. Did it cost our Lord Jesus Christ so much to procure this privilege for us, a liberty of access to God, and shall we live in the neglect of it? They that are far from God shall perish. It is good for us to draw nigh to him. Let us then make frequent approaches to him. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near." Heb. x. 19—22.

4. All our approaches to God should be through Jesus Christ. Did he suffer for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God? Will it not then be great presumption in us, to think of appearing before him out of Christ? "He is the way; no man can come unto the Father but by him." John xiv. 6. "He is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him."

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion.—Acts i. 2, 3.

HAVING attended Christ in our meditations on the cross and the grave; we have seen death and the powers of darkness, in all appearance, triumphing over him. Had the gospel-history of Christ broke off here, it would have been a sad story to us indeed; for had he perished in the grave, all our hopes of salvation must have sunk and perished with him. But I am now to bring you good tidings of great joy, viz. that Christ has risen, that in three days' time he broke the bands of death asunder, and rose again for our justification: and that after he staid some time with his disciples here on earth, he ascended triumphantly into heaven.

You will observe three remarkable points of the history of Christ, all couched in the words of my text.

I. The resurrection of Christ from the dead. "He showed himself alive after his passion."

1. The proofs and evidences of the fact: they are said in our text to be not only many, but of infallible certainty, by many infallible proofs.

such as render the matter not only exceedingly probable, but absolutely certain.

That Jesus truly died is out of all question. Pilate, the Roman governor, took care to be fully satisfied that he was quite dead : nor did the most inveterate enemies of his religion ever contest it. And that he really rose again from the dead, and was alive after his passion, was attested by sufficient, credible witnesses. There were several circumstances which concurred to render their testimony in this matter unquestionably true.

(1.) The number of witnesses was very sufficient : there were not only two or three, but scores and hundreds, who all declared, and stood to it. "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." 1 Cor. xv. 5. 6.

(2.) These witnesses had all proper advantages and opportunity of knowing the certainty of the matter : for most, if not all of them, were well known to have been familiarly conversant with him before his death. They declared that they saw him alive several times, in several places, in the day-time, as well as in the night ; that they sometimes touched and handled his body. John xx. 27, 28.

(3.) They were very unwilling to be deceived. They were so far from being easy and credulous in the matter, that they were hardly brought to believe it themselves. Luke xxiv. 11. Nay, the first time they saw him alive after his passion, they were terrified, ver. 37.

(4.) They published it immediately, as soon as the thing was done, which was the properest time to have the matter examined into ; and when, if it had not been true, no doubt but it might easily have been disproved.

(5.) The effect which this testimony had.

1.) Upon themselves : they gave the best proofs that men could give, that they firmly believed what they declared and testified, that Jesus was risen from the dead. For they went about, and preached it at the hazard of their lives, and of all that was dear to them in the world.

2.) On others : for though these witnesses of the resurrection of Christ were but a parcel of poor illiterate fishermen, men of no interest and figure in the world ; and the story which they told, viz. that God had raised Jesus from the dead, must needs be very ungrateful to the Jews ; and as for the gentiles, it was not to be expected but that they would receive it with contempt ; the doctrine which they preached, and which they grounded on the resurrection of Jesus, was very unpopular : and, wherever the apostles went and preached they were violently opposed and persecuted ; the magistrates and the rulers every where did all they could to silence them : yet, under all these discouragements and disadvantages, their testimony was presently received by thousands.

3.) Even the objections which were made to this testimony of the apostles, concerning the resurrection of Christ, were such as rather serve to confirm the truth of it. The Jews, who lived at the very time and on the spot, no doubt but they might easily have disproved it, if it had not been true. But they did not once pretend that Jesus was never quite dead ; nor did they offer to produce his dead body after the apostles had given it out that he was risen : all that they could or did pretend, was, that his disciples had stole him away by night, while the

watch slept: the most senseless thing, surely, that could be said; for how could the watch tell what was done when they were asleep?

As to what the modern deists object, that the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus were probably a parcel of enthusiastic persons, who were imposed upon by their own distempered fancies. Enthusiasm was never known in this world to produce any such effect as this, on so many persons at the same time, and at many times, and about a plain matter of fact: nay, and supposing it possible they should be deceived themselves, how vastly improbable is it, that they should be able to spread their fancy! It is with very good reason, that the sacred historian says, "Christ showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs."

2. The number and circumstances.

(1.) The time of his resurrection is particularly recorded, that it was on the third day from his death. He died not to rise immediately after he was buried, lest any should doubt whether he had been quite dead; besides, he loved his disciples too well to leave them long in so sad a suspense about him. The precise time of his resurrection was the third day after his death. "Him God raised on the third day." Acts x. 40. "Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly." Matt. xii. 40. For the Jews always reckoned the beginning of the day from the evening before it, the evening and the morning were the first day. Christ was literally, according to the Jewish computation of time, three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, or the grave.

(2.) Another memorable circumstance which the sacred history records, concerning the resurrection of Christ, is the ministry of angels in the affair. "The angel of the Lord descended from heaven." Matt. xxviii. 2. Two angels staid some time in the sepulchre, after Christ was risen, to show the place where he lay. They told the good news to the women. "He is not here, he is risen," ver. 6.

(3.) It is recorded, that Christ was accompanied in his resurrection by several of the saints. Matt. xxvii. 52, 53. Who those saints were, and what became of them afterwards, we do not read: it is enough for us to know, that they were designed for trophies of Christ's victory over death and the grave.

Observe.—Did God raise up Christ from the dead? then it is very certain that he came from God, and that he had taught the mind of God in truth; for, he put the proof of his mission on this single point, his resurrection from the dead. Matt. xii. 39, 40. Let the resurrection of Christ be improved to encourage our trust in him, and our hope of salvation by him. "God raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God." 1 Pet. i. 21. And how glorious are the blessings which from hence we may hope for? viz. pardon, a glorious resurrection, and eternal happiness. He rose for our justification. "Now is Christ risen." 1 Cor. xv. 20. 1 Thess. iv. 14. "Who hath begotten us again unto a lively hope." 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

II. The time of Christ's stay in this world after his resurrection, and of what he did during that time. "He gave commandments unto the apostles, whom he had chosen, and was seen of them forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Acts i. 2, 3.

It was, no doubt, to answer some very laudable purpose, that our

Saviour's ascension to heaven was delayed ; and there was such an interval betwixt the first and the second step of his exaltation. Just before he expired on the cross, he said, "It is finished." The work is done, justice is now satisfied. Why did he not immediately enter on his kingdom? I suppose there were these two reasons at least,—

1. To confirm the truth of his resurrection. For we read, that when he first appeared to his disciples alive after his passion, they were so transported with wonder and joy, that they hardly believed the thing was real ; "while they believed not for joy, and wondered." Luke xxiv. 41. To remove all doubt and suspicion about the matter, he was pleased to stay with them many days. He appeared to them over and over. Thus he confirmed his resurrection to his disciples by many infallible proofs, being seen by them forty days.

2. We must believe that Christ's love to, and care of his disciples detained him with them so long. Though heaven was ready for him, and he had obtained for himself a right of entering there ; yet as he knew that his disciples wanted his presence with them some time longer here on earth, he was pleased to stay, and defer his own heavenly glory for some days. They wanted to be better instructed concerning the kingdom of God. This is the very account which our text gives : He spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. He staid to settle all things for the good of his church. "After he had spoken to them, he was received up into heaven." Mark xvi. 19.

III. His ascension into heaven, after the expiration of those forty days, which is here expressed by his being taken up.

1. The manner and circumstances of Christ's ascension.

(1.) Where he ascended unto. He was taken up into heaven. The apostles saw him taken up ; they saw him mount up on high in the air, till a cloud received him out of their sight, and two angels came and told them that he was gone into heaven. Acts i. 9—11. "He ascended up far above all heavens." Eph. iv. 10, meaning, I suppose, those heavens which are at present visible to the inhabitants of this earth.

(2.) The place from whence our Saviour ascended into heaven, was the famous mount Olivet. For we read, that as soon as he was ascended, "the disciples returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet." Acts i. 12. This was the very place where a little before he had been in an agony ; where he was apprehended, and from whence he was led away to Jerusalem to be crucified : from thence also he now ascended into heaven. So shall the believer's sick and dying bed, where for the present, it may be, he feels much pain, be the place from whence his soul shall shortly ascend to heavenly joy and glory.

(3.) The manner of Christ's ascension was very honourable. He returned to heaven as a triumphant conqueror, after having obtained signal victories : angels attend to grace the triumph and praise the conqueror. "He ascended up on high ;" he was gloriously attended with "the chariots of God, even thousands of angels." Ps. lxxviii. 17, 18. Eph. iv. 8.

(4.) We may take notice of the witnesses of Christ's ascension, who, besides the angels, were his own disciples. "While they beheld, he was taken up." There was no need of their seeing him rise from the dead, for it was proof enough of his resurrection, that they saw him alive again

after his passion ; but as they could not see it in heaven, until they went there themselves, it was more necessary that they should see him ascending up towards it, that they might be witnesses of his ascension, as well as of his resurrection, as far as in the nature of things they could be.

But we wonder, it may be, that Christ should ascend from a solitary place, in the presence of only a few disciples. As the Jews had wilfully rejected all the miraculous evidences, which Christ had formerly given them, of his Divine mission and character, it was but just to deny them this last evidence of all. Nor is it certain that even this would have convinced them.

(5.) He departed with a blessing in his mouth. "He lifted up his hands and blessed them." Luke xxiv. 50, 51.

2. The ends and purposes of his ascension.

(1.) That he might receive the due reward of his own labours and sufferings. "Because he humbled himself." Phil. ii. 8, 9.

(2.) Christ ascended up to heaven, in the view of his disciples, for their encouragement and comfort. How would it animate their zeal, and enliven their hopes, when they called to mind what promises he had made them ! "Ye cannot follow me now, but ye shall follow me afterwards."

(3.) Christ ascended into heaven, is the forerunner of his friends and disciples. "Whither the forerunner is for us entered." Heb. vi. 20. "I go to prepare a place for you." John xiv. 2.

(4.) Christ ascended up to heaven, there to intercede for his people, to appear in the presence of God for them, and to be their advocate with the Father. Heb. ix. 24.

Is Christ ascended into heaven ? Let us follow him with our frequent thoughts, and with our warmest affections. Forget not, O my soul ! thine absent friend : often think of him, and of what he is now doing in heaven for thee. Let faith and hope bear thee up above the fear of death ; and think with pleasure and desire of the day, which will come shortly, when thou shalt depart from hence, and go to Jesus, see him as he is, and see what a glorious mansion he has prepared for thee in his Father's house, and enjoy his presence for ever ! John xiv. 3.

OF THE PARDON OF SIN.

There is forgiveness with thee.—Ps. cxxx. 4.

THE doctrine of pardon is of pure revelation ; it is not to be known by the light of nature : "As many as have sinned without law." Rom. ii. 12. Nor is this a doctrine of the law, which gives not the least hint of pardon, nor any encouragement to expect it. "As many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law," Rom. ii. 12, condemned without any hope of pardon. "Every transgression and disobedience" of the law, or word spoken by angels, "received a just recompense of reward ;" Heb. ii. 2 ; that is, proper and righteous punishment. Nor does the law regard a man's repentance, nor admit of any. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy." Heb. x. 28. But the doctrine of

pardon is a pure doctrine of the gospel, which Christ gave commission to his disciples to preach. Luke xxiv. 47. Acts xxvi. 18. Concerning which may be observed,

I. The proof that may be given of it, that there is such a thing as pardon of sin.

This is asserted in the text, "There is forgiveness with thee;" and by Daniel, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses," Dan. ix. 9, full and free pardon of sin. It is a blessing provided and promised in the covenant of grace; "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more;" Heb. viii. 12; it is the gracious proclamation the Lord has made of his name: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." Ex. xxxiv. 7. "Christ was set forth a propitiation, through faith in his blood, for the remission of sins." Rom. iii. 25. Matt. xxvi. 28. Eph. i. 7. And Christ is "exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance;" Acts v. 31; and it is, by his orders, published in the gospel: to which may be added, the numerous instances of it; the Israelites, who, as they often sinned, God had compassion on them, and forgave their iniquities; Ps. lxxviii. 38, and xcix. 8; and of David, Manasseh, and others; and of Saul, the blasphemer, the persecutor, and injurious person; and of other notorious sinners. Ps. xxxii. 5. 1 Tim. i. 13. Luke vii. 37—50. It is in this way God would have his people comforted, when burdened and distressed with their guilt and sin; Isa. xl. 1, 2. Matt. ix. 2; and they are favoured with a comfortable experience of it, and peace of soul from it. Ps. lxxxv. 1—3. Rom. v. 11. They are directed to pray for it. Ps. xxxii. 5, and li. 2, 7—9. Dan. ix. 19. Matt. vi. 12. Pardon of sin is a branch of redemption by the blood of Christ. Eph. i. 7.

II. The phrases by which the pardon of sin is expressed, and which will serve to lead into the nature of it.

1. By lifting it up, and taking it away: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven," Ps. xxxii. 1, is lifted up, taken off from him, and carried away. Sin lies upon the awakened sinner, as a burden too heavy for him to bear; which is taken away by the application of the blood of Christ.

2. By the covering of it: "Blessed is he whose sin is covered." Ps. xxxii. 1. "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin." Ps. lxxxv. 2. Sin is something impure, nauseous, and abominable in the sight of God, and provoking in the eyes of his glory, and must be covered out of sight; and this cannot be done by any thing of man's: not by his righteousness, which is but rags, a covering too narrow to be wrapped in, and can no more hide his nakedness than Adam's fig-leaves could hide his; nay, it is no better than a spider's web; and of which it may be said, "Their webs shall not become garments." Isa. lix. 6. Sin is only covered by Christ, who is the anti-type of the mercy-seat, which was a lid or cover to the ark.

3. By a non-imputation of it: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity," Ps. xxxii. 2, does not reckon it, nor place it to his account, nor bring any charge against him for it, nor punishes for it, but acquits him from it.

4. By a blotting of it out: in such language David prays for the forgiveness of sin, "Blot out my transgressions, and blot out all mine iniquities." Ps. li. 1, 9. And in the same way God declares his will to forgive the sins of the people; "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions;" Isa. xliii. 25; which language is used either in allusion to the crossing of debt-books, drawing a line over them; or to blotting out a man's hand-writing to a bond or note obliging to payment of money; hence the phrase of "blotting out the hand-writing of the ordinances that was against us." Col. ii. 14. Sins are debts, and these are numerous, and sinners poor, and unable to pay; God, for Christ's sake, freely forgives; "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud." Isa. xlv. 22. Sins may be compared to clouds, for their quantity, their number being many; for their quality, being exhaled out of the earth and sea, mount up to heaven, cause darkness, and intercept light; sin rises out of the earthly minds of men, who mind earthly things, and who are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest; and the sins of some, like those of Babylon, reach up to heaven, and call for wrath and vengeance to come down from thence; sin causes the darkness of unregeneracy, and is often the reason of darkness to such who have been made light in the Lord: it intercepts the light of his countenance and of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness; now, as a cloud is dispersed and dissipated by the breaking forth of the sun, which, overcoming the cloud, scatters it, so as it is seen no more; in like manner, through the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in his wings.

5. By a non-remembrance of it: "And their iniquities will I remember no more." Heb. viii. 12. Isa. xliii. 25. God forgives and forgets; having once forgiven them, he thinks of them no more.

6. By making sin, or rather sinners, white as snow; so David prays, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Ps. li. 7. So the Lord promises, "Thy sins shall be as white as snow." Isa. i. 18. "Her Nazarites are purer than snow." Lam. iv. 7.

III. What sins are pardoned? sins both with respect to quality and quantity.

1. For quality; they are called trespasses. Sin is a walking on forbidden ground, for which a man must suffer, unless forgiven; and transgressions of the law of God; a passing over and going beyond the bounds and limits prescribed it; and iniquities, which are contrary to the rules of justice and equity; and sins, errors, aberrations, strayings from the rule of God's word: when God is said to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin, it takes in every kind and sort of sin: sins are called abominations; not that they are so to sinners, for they delight in them; but to God, to whom they are so very disagreeable. Sin is defined, a transgression of the law, 1 John iii. 4, a breach, a violation of it; which accuses of it, pronounces guilty for it, and curses and condemns; and is only forgiven by the Lawgiver, who is able to save and destroy. Sins are sometimes represented as debts: because, being committed, they oblige to the debt of punishment, which God remits: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities," Ps. ciii. 3. Isa. xxxiii. 24. Mal. iv. 2.

2. For quantity; all trespasses, sins, and transgressions are forgiven.

Col. ii. 13. Ps. ciii. 3. Some are more secret, some more open, some less, others greater, more daring and presumptuous; some sins of commission, other sins of omission; but all are forgiven. See Isa. xliii. 22—25.

IV. The efficient cause is God, and not any creature, angels nor men.

1. It is not in the power of men to forgive sin; one man may forgive another an offence, as committed against himself; but not as committed against God; saints ought to forgive one another's offences that arise among them; as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven them. Eph. iv. 32. Col. ii. 13.

2. There is nothing a man has, nor can do, by which he can procure the pardon of sin, either for himself or for others:

(1.) No man, by his riches, and the multitude of his wealth, can give to God a ransom for himself, or his brother; make atonement and satisfaction for sin, and obtain the pardon of it. "Riches profit not in the day of wrath." Bags of gold and silver will be of no avail.

(2.) Nor is pardon of sin to be obtained by works of righteousness: could it, it would not be of grace; for grace and works are opposed to each other: men would be saved by works, contrary to the scriptures, since pardon is included in salvation, and that is by grace and not works.

(3.) Nor is pardon procured by repentance; they are both gifts of grace; and though given to the same persons, the one is not the cause of the other; at least, repentance is not the cause of remission; for true evangelical repentance flows from, and in the exercise of it, is influenced by the discovery and application of pardoning grace. See Ezek. xvi. 63; Luke vii. 37, 47. Nor is pardon procured by faith, as the cause of it; faith does not obtain it by any virtue of its own, but receives it as obtained by the blood of Christ. Acts x. 43; xxvi. 18.

(4.) Nor is it procured by a submission to the ordinance of water-baptism: baptism neither takes away original sin, nor actual sin; not as to the guilt thereof, as the case of Simon Magus shows; for though the three thousand are directed to be baptized in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins; and Saul was advised by Ananias to arise, and be baptized, and wash away his sins, Acts ii. 38; xxii. 16; yet the meaning is not, as if remission of sins were to be obtained by baptism; but that, by means of this ordinance, they might be led to the sufferings, death, and blood-shed of Christ, represented in it.

(5.) God only can forgive sin; it is his sole prerogative; it belongs to him, and no other. Mark ii. 7. Isa. xliii. 25. Dan. ix. 9. And this appears from the nature of sin itself; it is committed against God; and none but he against whom it is committed can forgive it. Who is a God like unto him, that pardoneth iniquity? Mic. vii. 18. Saints in all ages never made their application to any other. Ps. li. 1. Dan. ix. 19. Matt. vi. 9. 12. Acts viii. 22.

V. The effects of pardon, that is, when applied; for the effects of it are not sensibly perceived, unless applied; which are,

1. Peace of conscience: when sin is charged upon the conscience, and there is no sight and sense of pardon, there is no peace; but no sooner is there a view of interest in justification, by the righteousness of Christ, and pardon by his blood, but there is peace. Rom. v. 1.

2. Cheerfulness of spirit : when sin lies as a heavy burden, without a view of pardon, the mind is depressed ; it is filled with gloominess, as in the case of Cain : a wounded spirit who can bear ? But when the Lord says, " Son, or daughter, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee !" cheerfulness takes place ; the spirits are raised ; the head is lifted up. Ps. li. 8.

3. Comfort of soul : whilst a gracious soul, under a sense of sin, apprehends that God is angry with him, he has no comfort ; but when he manifests his pardoning grace, then he concludes his anger is turned away, and he is comforted : " Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." Isa. xl. 1, 2.

4. Access to God with boldness and confidence : a soul, under the weight and pressure of the guilt of sin, moves heavily to the throne of grace ; and when he comes there, cannot lift up his eyes ; but, looking downward, and smiting on his breast, says, " God be merciful to me a sinner ;" but when it has a view of the blood, righteousness, and sacrifice of Christ, it comes with liberty, boldness, and confidence. Rom. v. 1, 2.

5. Attendance on divine worship with pleasure and delight : this flows from a sense of forgiveness of sin, and is one end of it : " There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." Ps. cxxx. 4 ; Heb. xii. 28.

6. Love to God and Christ is raised, promoted, and increased, by an application of pardon. Luke vii. 47.

7. Evangelical repentance, and the exercise of it, are much influenced by pardon of sin being applied. Ezek. xvi. 63.

8. Thankfulness of soul for such a mercy ; than which there cannot be a greater : if a man be truly impressed with the sense of it, he will call upon his soul, and all within him, to bless and praise the Lord for all his benefits ; and particularly for this. " Who forgiveth all thine iniquities." Ps. ciii. 2, 3.

ON CONVERSION.

And be converted.—Acts iii. 19.

CONVERSION, though it may seem, in some respects, to fall in with regeneration, yet may be distinguished from it. Regeneration is the sole act of God : conversion consists both of God's act upon men, in turning them, and of acts done by men, under the influence of converting grace ; they turn, being turned. Regeneration is the motion of God towards and upon the heart of a sinner ; conversion is the motion of a sinner towards God, as one expresses it. In regeneration men are wholly passive, as they also are in the first moment of conversion ; but by it become active : it is therefore sometimes expressed passively, " Ye are returned," or converted, 1 Pet. ii. 25, and sometimes actively : " A great number believed, and turned to the Lord," Acts xi. 21, " and when it," the body of the people of the Jews, " shall turn to the Lord," which has respect to their conversion in the latter day. 2 Cor. iii. 16.

I. What conversion is, and wherein it lies : the conversion to be treated of is not,

1. An external one, or what lies only in an outward reformation of life and manners, such as that of the Ninevites, for this may be where internal conversion is not, as in the Scribes and Pharisees.

2. Nor is it a mere doctrinal one, nor a conversion from false notions before imbibed, to a set of doctrines and truths which are according to the scriptures ; so men of old were converted from Judaism and heathenism to Christianity : but all that were so converted to a doctrinal sense were not true and real converts ; some had "the form of godliness without the power, a name to live," &c. 2 Tim. iii. 5.

3. Nor the restoration of the people of God from backsliding, when they are in a very affecting and importunate manner called upon to return to the Lord : Jer. iii. 12, 14, 22. Hos. xiv. 1—4 ; so Peter, when he fell through temptation, and denied his Lord, and was recovered from it by a look from Christ, it is called his conversion. Luke xxii. 32. But,

4. The conversion under consideration, is a true, real, internal work of God upon the souls of men.

(1.) In the turn of the heart to God, of the thoughts of the heart ; which are only evil, and that continually, and about evil things, not about God and the things of God ; God is not in all their thoughts, nor in any of the thoughts of wicked men ; but when converted, their thoughts are about their state and condition by nature, about their souls, and their eternal welfare : it is a turn of the desires of the heart, which before were after vain, sinful lusts and pleasures ; but now after God and communion with him, after Christ and salvation : of the affections of the heart, which before were inordinate, and ran in a wrong channel, towards God, their hearts being circumcised to love him ; and whom they love with their whole hearts and souls, because he first loved them. Conversion is a turn of the mind from carnal things to spiritual ones, and from earthly things to heavenly ones ; yea, it is a turn of the will, which before conversion is in a very bad state, is stubborn and inflexible, biased to and bent upon that which is evil, and averse to all that is good ; but in conversion God works in men both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

(2.) Conversion lies in a man's being turned from darkness to light ; the apostle was sent "to turn them from darkness to light," Acts xxvi. 18, that is to be the instrument or means of their conversion, by preaching the gospel.

(3.) "From the power of Satan unto God," as in the above place. Acts xxvi. 18. Satan has great power over men in an unconverted state ; his seat is in their hearts, which are the palace in which he rules ; he works effectually with great power and energy in the children of disobedience ; but now in conversion they are turned from his power, he is dispossessed of them, and his armour taken from him in which he trusted : the prey is taken out of the hands of the mighty.

(4.) Conversion lies in turning men from idols, to serve the living God ; not merely from idols of silver and gold, of wood and stone, as formerly, but from the idols of a man's own heart, his lusts and corrup-

tions; with respect to which the language of a converted sinner is, "What have I to do any more with idols?" this is a blessing bestowed in conversion. "Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." Acts iii. 26.

(5.) Conversion lies in turning men from their own righteousness to the righteousness of Christ; not from doing works of righteousness, for such converted persons are most fit for, and most capable of, and are under the greatest obligations to perform: but from depending upon them for justification before God, and acceptance with him.

(6.) Conversion lies in a man's turning to the Lord actively, under the influence of divine grace: and by this phrase it is often expressed in scripture, as in Isa. x. 21; Acts xi. 21; 2 Cor. iii. 16; men being thoroughly convinced that there is salvation in no other but in Christ, that it is in vain to expect it elsewhere; they turn to Christ as their lord and lawgiver, and submit to his commands, renouncing all other lords, and their dominion over them; and though in their natural state they are like sheep going astray, in conversion they are returned to Christ, as the great shepherd and bishop of souls.

II. The causes of conversion.

1. The efficient cause, which is not man, but God.

(1.) Not by the power of man; what is said of the conversion, or turning of the Jews from their captivity, is true of the conversion of a sinner, that "it is not by might, nor by power," that is not of man, "but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." Zech. iv. 6. Men are dead in a moral sense whilst unconverted, they are dead in trespasses and sins, which are the cause of their death; and their very living in them is no other than a moral death: nor can they quicken themselves, and unless they are quickened, they cannot be converted. Conversion is such an alteration in a man, as is not in his power to effect: it is like that of an Ethiopian changing his skin, and a leopard his spots. Such things are never heard of, as a blackmoor becoming white, and a leopard becoming clear of his spots; and as unlikely is it, that a man should convert himself. Jer. xiii. 23. A tree must first be made good so as to bring forth good fruit.

(2.) Nor is conversion owing to the will of men; the will of man, before conversion, is in a bad state; it chooses its own ways, and delights in its abominations, it is in high pursuit after the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Conversion is denied to be of the will of men; as the whole of salvation is not of him that willeth, so this part of it in particular; regeneration, with which conversion, in the first moment of it, agrees, "is not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Rom. ix. 16. John i. 13.

(3.) God only is the author and efficient cause of conversion. He that made man's heart, and formed the spirit of man within him, he only can turn their hearts, and frame and mould their spirits, as he pleases; the heart of a king, and so of every other man, is in the hand of the Lord; he makes his people willing, in the day of his power, to do what they had before no will nor inclination to do, and yet they act most freely; the man-slayer did not more willingly flee to a city of refuge, to

shelter him from the avenger of blood, than a sinner, sensible of his danger, flees to Christ for refuge, and lays hold on the hope set before him.

2. The moving or impulsive cause of conversion, is the love, grace, mercy, favour, and good will of God; and not the merits of men; for what is there in men before conversion, to move God to take such a step in their favour? See 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. Eph. ii. 2—5.

3. The instrumental cause, or means of conversion, is usually the ministry of the word; sometimes, indeed, it is wrought without the word, by some remarkable, awakening providence or another, and sometimes by reading the scriptures: but, for the most part, it is through the preaching of the word: hence, ministers are said to turn many to righteousness; and the apostle Paul says, he was sent by Christ unto the Gentile world, “to turn men from darkness to light;” and this is done both by the preaching of the law and the gospel. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” Ps. xix. 7. “The preaching of the law is made use of by the Spirit of God, to convince of sin, “for by the law is the knowledge of sin;” though some take this to be rather preparatory to conversion, than conversion itself, which may be ascribed to the gospel. “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law?” that is, by preaching the doctrine of obedience to it; “or, by the hearing of faith?” that is, by the doctrine of the gospel, preaching faith in Christ; which is therefore called the word of faith, and by which it comes; for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;” Gal. iii. 2; Rom. x. 8—17; but then, the preaching of the word of the gospel is not sufficient of itself to produce the work of conversion in the heart; men may hear it, and not be converted by it; for “who is Paul, or who is Apollos, but ministers, or, instruments, by whom ye believed?” 1 Cor. iii. 5.

III. The subjects of conversion.

Lost sinners redeemed by Christ are the subjects—“I will hiss for them,” by the ministry of the word, “and gather them,” which is another phrase for conversion, “because I have redeemed them.” Zech. x. 8. “Sinners shall be converted unto thee;” Ps. li. 13; sinners by nature and by practice, and some of them the worst and chief of sinners; and therefore the wonderful grace of God is the more displayed in their conversion. 1 Cor. vi. 11; 1 Tim. 13—15.

REPENTANCE.

Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.—2 Cor. vii. 10.

GODLY sorrow has for its object sin committed against God; or rather, godly sorrow is the grief of a man, who repents of his sins as God would have him repent. The sorrow of the world is that, which hath worldly blessings for its object: or it is the grief of a man, who repents of his sins as worldly men repent. Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation; or, as it may be rendered, saving repentance, not to be re-

pented of. In a little time he will derive from this very anguish, substantial comfort and joy. "The sorrow of the world worketh death;" that is to say, either the sorrow which is occasioned by the loss of earthly enjoyments, is fatal to him who gives himself up to it, a broken spirit drieth the bones; or "the sorrow of the world worketh death," because such a repentance as that of worldlings will never obtain the forgiveness that is promised to those that truly repent. Godly sorrow, then, is the principal object of your contemplations.

I. The causes which produce it.

The remembrance of sin is cause of godly sorrow in the heart of a true penitent. While a sinner is committing sin, he resembles an enchanted man, a fatal charm fascinates his eyes and sears his conscience. He judges of truth and error, happiness and misery, only according to the interest of his reigning passion. Reason, persuade, open the treasures of heaven, and the abysses of hell, he remains insensible; so foolish and ignorant is he, he is like a beast before you. Ps. lxxiii. 22. But there is another period, a time of after-reflection on his sinful conduct. Then the remembrance of sin is cutting. Then his soul is full of tears. Then that sin, which had been sweet as honey in his mouth, becomes bitter in his belly. Rev. x. 10.

1. The sinner is affected with the number of his sins. When we reflect on our past lives, sins arise from all parts, and absorb our minds in their multitude. We owe all our existence to a Supreme Being, and we are responsible to him for every moment of our duration. There are duties of ages, obligations that belong to childhood, youth. There are obligations that lie upon people, rich, poor. Each of these is a class of obligation, and almost each of them is a list of crimes. "Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart." Gen. vi. 5. "Our iniquities are increased over our heads." Ezra ix. 6. "Innumerable evils have compassed me about." Ps. xl. 12.

2. Enmity. What can be more opposite to the genius of Christianity than the spirit of pride, which reigns over almost all of us? What can be more criminal than those calumnies and slanderous falsehoods, which infect the greatest part of our conversation? to maintain which, could we enter into our own hearts, would take the pains to examine the nature of our own sins, we should soon find ourselves black and hideous.

3. A third idea that afflicts a penitent is, that of the fatal influence which his sins have had on the soul of his neighbour. One sin strikes a thousand blows, while it seems to aim at striking only one. It is a contagious poison, which diffuseth far and wide. Hence, we generally see, if a father be ignorant of religion, his children are ignorant of religion. You are a master, who cannot sin without emboldening your apprentices and workmen to sin, not without making your families schools of error, and your shops academies of the devil. Dreadful thoughts!

4. The weakness of motives to sin is the fourth cause of the sorrow of a penitent. What proportion is there between the motives to vice and motives to virtue? Motives to sin are innumerable and various; but what are they all, when he begins to consider them in their true point of view?

5. Uncertainty of his state. For although the mercy of God be in-

finite, and he never rejects those who sincerely repent, yet, it is certain, the sinner, in the first moment of his penitence, hath reason to doubt of his state, and till the evidences of his conversion become clear, there is almost as much probability of his destruction as of his salvation. Terrible uncertainty!

The gospel says, plainly enough, "If any man sin, there is an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ;" 1 John ii. 1; but the same gospel declares, as plainly, that "it is impossible for those, who were once enlightened, if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." Heb. vi. 4—6. I see, indeed, in the New Testament, a Peter who repented and was pardoned, after he had denied his Saviour; but the same book shows me also a Judas, who died in despair. Have I committed only pardonable offences, or have I been guilty of those crimes for which there is no forgiveness? Are the riches of the goodness and forbearance of God yet open to me, or are they closed against me? Am I a real penitent, or am I only an apparent one? Shall I be damned? shall I be saved? perhaps the one, perhaps the other: perhaps heaven, perhaps hell. O fatal uncertainty! dreadful horror! cruel doubt! This is the fifth arrow of the Almighty, that wounds the heart of a repenting sinner.

6. Perhaps hell. This is my sixth reflection. Hell is an idea, against which there is no philosophy to comfort, no profaneness to protect, no brutality to harden. Who can support the idea of the torments of hell, especially when their duration is added? yet this is the idea that strikes a penitent; he condemns himself to suffer this punishment, he places himself on the edge of this gulf.

7. The last arrow that woundeth the heart of a penitent is an arrow of Divine love. To have offended a God whom he loves, a God whom so many excellences render lovely, a God whom he longs again to love! These thoughts excite such sorrow in the soul, as nothing but experience can give men to understand.

II. St. Paul speaks of the effects of godly sorrow only in general terms in our text; he says, "it worketh repentance to salvation:" but in the following verse he speaks more particularly, "Behold this self-same thing."

The first effect of godly sorrow is what our apostle calls carefulness; or, as I would rather read it, vigilance. I understand by this term, the disposition of a man who, feeling a sincere sorrow for his sins, and being actually under the afflicting hand of God, is not content with a few general notions, and a little vague knowledge of his own irregularities; but uses all his efforts to examine every circumstance of his life, and to dive into the least obvious parts of his own conscience, in order to discover whatever is offensive to that God whose favour he most earnestly implores. God has taken away my fortune, but perhaps I abused it; perhaps it excited my pride. God took away my child, the whole comfort of my life; but probably he saw I made an idol of it. God sent a sickness; but perhaps health was a snare to me. "What clearing of yourselves," 2 Cor. vii. 11, adds St. Paul. The Greek word signifies *apology*, and it will be best understood by joining the following expression with it, "yea, what indignation." In the sorrow of the world, apology and indignation are usually companions: indignation against him

who represents the atrocity of a sin, and apology for him who commits it. Now change the objects of indignation and apology, and you will have a just notion of the dispositions of the Corinthians, and of the effects which godly sorrow produces. Let your apology have for its object that ministry which you have treated so unworthily: let your indignation turn against yourselves, and then ye will have a right to pretend to the prerogatives of true repentance. The apostle adds, "yea, what fear." By fear, in this place, we understand that self-diffidence which an idea of the sins we have committed ought naturally to inspire. In this sense St. Paul says to the Romans, "Be not high-minded, but fear," xi. 20. Fear, that is to say, distrust thyself. I do not mean a bare speculative diffidence that persuades the mind: I understand a practical fear, which penetrates the heart, inspires us with salutary cautions against the repetition of such sins as we are most inclined to commit.

In the fifth place, "what vehement desire." This is another vague term. Godly sorrow produceth divers kinds of desires. Here I confine it to one meaning; it signifies, I think, a desire of participating the favour of God. "I will arise and go to my Father." Luke xv. 18. "Cast me not away from thy presence." Ps. li. 11, 12.

Finally. Zeal is the sixth effect of godly sorrow; and it may have three sorts of objects, God, our neighbours, and ourselves.

III. The blessings with which it is accompanied: "repentance produceth godly sorrow, not to be repented of."

This is one of those turns of expression, by which, while a subject seems to be diminished, the highest ideas are given of it. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance;" that is to say, it is always a full source of consolation, joy, &c. Godly sorrow reconciles us to three enemies, who, while we live in sin, attack us with implacable rage.

1. The first enemy who attacks us while we live in sin, is the justice of God. There can be no other relation between God and an obstinate sinner, than that which subsists between judge and criminal. "God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity." Hab. i. 13. Godly sorrow reconciles us to divine justice. This is, perhaps, of all propositions, the least disputable, the most clear, and the most demonstrable. Consult your own reason, it will inform you, "God is good;" it will prove, by all the objects that surround you, that it is not possible for God to refuse mercy to a penitent. To reason add authority, and it will appear, that all mankind profess to be guilty of sin, and to adore a God of pardoning mercy. To reason and authority, add revelation. But how is it possible for me, at present, even to hint all the comfortable testimonies of revelation on this article? Revelation gives you ideas of the mercies of God, the most tender, the most effecting, the most sublime; it speaks of bowels troubled, repentings kindled together at the sound of a penitent's plaintive voice. Jer. xxxi. 20. Hos. xi. 8. Revelation speaks of oaths uttered by God himself, whose bare word is evident enough. "As I live, saith the Lord." Ezek. xxxiii. 11. St. Paul tells us, "Because God could swear by no greater, he sware by himself." Heb. vi. 13. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Revelation opens to you these fountains of life, which were opened to the house of David. Zech. xiii. 1. Consult experience, and it will show

you a cloud where repentance was accepted. Witness, many a time, the whole people of Israel, witness Moses, witness David, witness Hezekiah, witness Manasseh, witness Nebuchadnezzar, witness Nineveh, witness that prostitute which wept in Simon's house, witness the poor publican, witness the thief.

2. As godly sorrow reconciles us to Divine justice, so it reconciles us to our own conscience. We sometimes lull conscience into a deep sleep; but it is very difficult to keep it from starting and waking. Woe be to them who throw it into a deep sleep, to wake no more! But how dreadful when it awakes! does it arise from its sleep? What blows does it strike! what wounds does it make! when it says to a sinner, miserable wretch! "My punishment is greater than I can bear; mountains cover me; hills fall upon me." Gen. iv. 13. Hos. x. 8.

3. In fine, godly sorrow reconciles us to death. While we live without repentance, "the sting of death is sin," 1 Cor. xv. 56, and sin has no sting for a penitent believer. Death appears to the repenting, believing sinner, as a messenger of grace, sent to conduct him to a merciful God, and to open to him ineffable felicity, flowing from boundless mercy. Ah! my brethren, would to God it were as easy to prove, that you bear the marks of true repentance, as it is to display its prerogatives! But, alas! I dare not even move this question: and yet, what wait you around the pulpit for? why came you to hear this sermon? Tell me, in what period of your lives were you in possession of all those characters of godly sorrow? Was it in your closet, was it in company, was it at the table of Jesus Christ? Perhaps we may repent when we are dying. What a forced submission! Let each of us close this solemnity by saying, "Thou art my portion, O Lord!" Ps. cxix. 57.

MINISTRATION OF ANGELS.

Are they not all ministering spirits?—Heb. i. 14.

WE are certain, from the scriptures of truth, that there are holy angels. But if we inquire what is their exact number, their distinct orders, their different degrees, when created, and how far they agree with, differ from, or in what particular qualities they excel the souls of men; these, and many other such unnecessary questions, neither reason nor revelation say any thing about; and therefore it is impossible to answer them. "Let no man beguile you of your reward." Col. ii. 18.

1. What may be learned of this subject from scripture.

1. The text tells us that to minister for our good, is a part of the ordinary employment to which they are appointed.

2. This is not the work of one angel only, but "they are all sent forth to minister." Ps. xxxiv. 7. Heb. i. 14.

3. They have had distinct employments assigned them on different occasions, as the honour of God and necessities of his church required. Luke i. 13. Acts x. 3, 7. xii. 7—11. Dan. iii. 28.

4. In this office they are servants of Jesus Christ, as the great Head

of the church. "He took upon himself the form of a servant;" yet we may always discover a very striking difference between him and them. He came voluntarily; they, from the state and condition of their creation, must act according to his appointment. Col. i. 15, 16. He ministered only for a little time, during his abode amongst us; they, from the beginning to the end of the world. He was sent on the great and mighty work of mediation, which none was worthy to undertake, none able to effect but himself; they are employed about the ordinary concerns of the saints. He, as the Son of God, "whose throne is for ever and ever;" they, as our fellow-servants, worship him with us. Rev. xix. 6. He, as the sole author of our eternal salvation; they, as subordinate assistants in the particular promotion of it. Eph. i. 20—22.

5. Much of their work is to oppose the malice of evil spirits, who seek our hurt; and to defend us from their rage and subtilty. Rev. xii. 7, 9. Matt. iv. 11. 1 Thess. ii. 18.

6. God by them suggests good motions to the minds of his saints. It is probable they have at least as much power to suggest good thoughts, as Satan has to inject evil. If it be asked, how these good motions from angels may be distinguished from the motions of the Holy Ghost, and his influence on the minds of believers? it is answered,

(1.) Angelic motions are from without, but the Spirit of our Father dwelleth in us.

(2.) They consist in occasional impressions; and are made by advantages taken from outward objects, and the present dispositions of the soul; whereas the Holy Spirit, by his operations, engages all the faculties of the soul, really and immediately citing them to generous actions, according to their nature and qualities.

(3.) Angels in their suggestions communicate no strength to perform good actions; they only stir us up to use the strength we have already in possession; but the Holy Ghost strengthens us with all might by his glorious power in our inner man, and effectually works every good work in us.

(4.) Angelical impressions are transient; but the gracious influences of the Holy Ghost are continual. "Whosoever drinketh of this water." John iv. 13, 14.

7. They are appointed in their ministry to be witnesses of our obedience, sufferings, &c. 1 Cor. iv. 9. 1 Tim. v. 21. 1 Cor. xi. 10.

8. We read that the saints, after death, are carried by angels into Abraham's bosom.

9. They will attend Christ at his coming to judgment, to deliver his friends from every danger, and to execute the vengeance written upon all his obstinate enemies. 1 Thess. iv. 16. Matt. xiii. 30, 41, 49.

II. What particular reason can be given, why God uses the ministration of angels in bringing home the heirs of salvation.

Doubtless the principal reason is, "Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight;" yet the scriptures assign several others, such as,

1. It employs and manifests the obedience of the angels, that in them the church militant may have a fair example.

2. Hereby a blessed intercourse and fellowship is maintained between the several parts of the family of God; consisting of saints on earth and angels in heaven. Heb. xii. 22.

3. To reproach, awe, and restrain the devil. It is inconceivable what mischief might be done by this arch enemy, were it not for the constant vigilance of these holy watchers. Rev. ii. 10.

4. That the saints may see the greatness and glory of redemption, which even the angels desire to look into.

Inferences.

1. We should be very careful to use great sobriety in all our meditations on the subject, and never pretend "to be wise above what is written."

2. Danger should not deter us from duty. We have the sacred word for our guide ; let us abide by that, and we are safe ; whether we treat of angels, who are still preserved holy and happy, or of such as have dreadfully fallen into sin and misery.

3. There is no sufficient reason to believe, that every Christian has a particular guardian angel appointed to take care of him. It cannot increase our consolation, but has a dangerous tendency to superstition.

4. Such is the love and care of God towards his saints in their present state of trial, that he sends the glorious attendants on his throne to minister to them ; he who gave his only Son to die for them, will certainly send his holy angels to bring them safe home to the purchased possession. Heaven and earth shall be witnesses of his care, and of the value which he puts upon them.

Lastly, Let us always remember, that in all our approaches to God as humble worshippers, we join with the holy angels and bear our part in the heavenly concert. O that our hearts may be daily preparing to sing with them, on the heights of Zion, the endless praises of "Him that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood, to whom be glory for ever. Amen." Rev. v. 9.

THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH.

For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living.—Job xxx. 23.

THESE words contain a general truth, and a particular application of it. The general truth is supposed, viz. That all men must die. But whither must they go ? "To the house appointed for all living : " to the grave, that gloomy, solitary house, in the land of forgetfulness. All living men must be inhabitants of this house. They who now live in palaces, and they who have not where to lay their heads. Job seems to intimate in the text, that we have no life in this world, but as runaways from death, which stretcheth out its cold arms to receive us from the womb ; but though we do then narrowly escape, we cannot escape long ; we shall be brought back again to it. Job knew this : "For I know that thou wilt bring me to death."

I. The certainty of death. All must die.

Although this doctrine be confirmed by the experience of all former generations, ever since Abel entered "the house appointed for all

living;" and though the living know that they shall die, yet it is needful to discourse on the certainty of death, that it may be impressed on the mind, and duly considered. Wherefore, consider,

1. There is an unalterable statute of death, under which men are included. "It is appointed unto men once to die." Heb. ix. 27. There is no peradventure in it; we must needs die. Though some men will not hear of death, yet every man must see death. We must enter the lists with it, and it will have the mastery. "There is no man hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit." Eccl. viii. 8. Those who are found alive at Christ's coming, shall receive a change equivalent to death.

2. If we consult daily observation. Every one seeth that "wise men die, likewise the fool and brutish person." It is long since death began to transport men into another world, and vast multitudes are gone thither already; yet death is carrying off new inhabitants daily "to the house appointed." Who could ever hear the grave say, It is enough? This world is like a great fair, or market, where some are coming in, others going out; while the assembly that is in it are confused, and many know not wherefore they are assembled; or, like a town situated on the road to a great city, through which some travellers are past, some are passing, while others are only coming in: "one generation passeth away." Death is an inexorable, irresistible messenger, who cannot be diverted from executing his orders by the force of the mighty, the bribes of the rich, nor the entreaties of the poor. It does not reverence the hoary head, nor pity the harmless babe. The bold and daring cannot outbrave it, nor can the faint hearted obtain a discharge.

3. The human body consists of perishing principles: "Dust thou art." Gen. iii. 19. The strongest are but little earthen vessels. The body is not a house of stone, but a house of clay; the mud walls cannot but moulder away, seeing the foundation is in the dust. When we consider the structure of our bodies, death has as many doors to enter in by, as the body hath pores. Though the lamp of our life be not violently blown out, yet the flame must at length go out, for want of oil. And what are all the diseases to which we are liable but the harbingers of death!

4. We have sinful souls, and therefore have dying bodies: death follows sin, as the shadow follows the body. "In the day that thou eatest thereof." Gen. ii. 17. Not only the wicked, but the godly must die too; Christ hath taken the sting of death from believers. Wherefore, though death fasten on them, as the viper did on Paul's hand, it will do them no harm.

5. Man's life in this world is but a few degrees removed from death. The scripture represents it as vain and empty, short in continuance, and swift in its passage.

(1.) Vain and empty! While it is, it vanisheth away, and lo! it is not: "my days are vanity." If you suspect afflicted Job in this matter, hear the wise and prosperous Solomon. "All things have I seen, in the days of my vanity," *i. e.* my vain days. Moses compares them to a sleep: "They are a sleep." Few men have right apprehensions of life until death awakens them. "We spend our years as a tale that is told." It is a dream, a vision of the night. "He shall fly away as a dream, and

shall not be found; yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night." It is but a vain show. "Surely man is a vain show."

The several periods of our life are vanity.—"Childhood and youth are vanity." Our childhood is spent in trifling pleasures, which become the scorn of our own after-thoughts. Youth is a flower that soon withereth, a blossom that quickly falls off; and, ere we are awake, it is past; and we are in middle age, encompassed with a thick cloud of cares, and find ourselves beset with pricking thorns of difficulties. Then comes old age, attended with its own train of infirmities, labour, and sorrow, and sets us down next door to the grave. In a word, every stage or period of life is vanity. "Man at his best estate is vanity." Death carries off some in the bud of childhood, others in the blossom of youth, and others when they come to their fruit; few are left standing till, like ripe corn, they forsake the ground.

(2.) Short. It is not only vanity, but a short-lived vanity. The life of man in the scriptures was sometimes reckoned by hundreds of years, now hundreds are brought down to scores: three score and ten, or four-score, is its utmost length. Yet, as if years were too big a word for the life of man, we find it counted by months: "The number of his months are with thee;" our course is like that of the moon. But frequently it is reckoned by days, and those but few: "Man that is born of a woman is of few days." Job xiv. 1. Nay, it is accounted but one day: "Till he shall accomplish as an hireling his day." Yea, the scripture brings it down to the shortest space of time, "a moment; our light afflictions." Nay, the Psalmist carries it to the lowest pitch: "Mine age is as nothing before thee." Ps. xxxix. 5. Agreeably to this, Solomon tells us, "There is a time to be born, and a time to die;" but makes no mention of a time to live.

Consider also the various similitudes by which the scripture represents the brevity or shortness of man's life. Hear Hezekiah, "Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent." Man is like grass: "All flesh is grass," and like the flower of the field, exposed to the foot of every beast. James proposeth the question, "What is your life?" Hear his own answer, "It is even as a vapour." It is as smoke that goeth out of the chimney. As the wind: "O remember that my life is wind." Our breath is in our nostrils, as if always on the wing to depart.

(3.) Swift as a shadow it passeth away: "He fleeth as a shadow, and continueth not." Job xiv. 2. As a weaver's shuttle; "our days are swifter than the weaver's shuttle." See how Job describes the swiftness of the time of life: "Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good. They are hasted away as the swift ships; as the eagle that hasteth to the prey." Job ix. 26. Yet the wind faileth, the ship's course is marred; but our time is always running with a rapid course.

Improvement.

1. Let us hence, as in a glass, behold the vanity of the world; look into the grave, listen to the doctrine of death, and learn,

(1.) This world is a false friend, who leaves a man in time of greatest need.

(2.) That hold as fast as thou canst, thou shalt be forced to let go thy hold.

2. It may serve as a storehouse for Christian contentment, and patience under worldly crosses and losses. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb," &c. "There the wicked cease from troubling. There the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor." Death will put all on a level: "The small and the great are there."

3. It may serve as a bridle, to curb all manner of lust.

(1.) To remit our inordinate care for the body. "What shall I eat?" often arises, and leaves no room for that of more importance, viz. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?"

(2.) To abate our pride. "Thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away."

(3.) It may check our worldly lust. "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims."

(4.) Our worldly-mindedness. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? Thou fool."

Lastly, It may serve for a spur to incite us to prepare for death. "It is appointed unto man once to die;" much of our time is already gone: "Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Eccl. ix. 10.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWIXT THE

RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED IN THEIR DEATH.

The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death.—Prov. xiv. 32.

THIS text looks like the cloud betwixt the Israelites and Egyptians, having a dark side towards the latter, and a bright side towards the former. It represents death, like Pharaoh's gaoler, bringing the chief butler and the chief baker out of the prison: the one to be restored to his office, and the other to be led to execution. It shows the difference betwixt the godly and ungodly in their death. Consider,

I. The death of the wicked. "The wicked is driven away."

By the wicked we are not only to understand the outwardly profane, but all who are in their natural state, unregenerated, not united to Christ, reckoned wicked.

1. "The wicked is driven away."

(1.) Suddenly. Not that all wicked men die suddenly, nor that they are all wicked who die so. But,

1.) Death commonly comes on unexpectedly, and so surpriseth them; as the deluge on the whole world; as travail on a woman with child; as a thief in the night.

2.) Unprepared for it. The old house falls down before they have another provided.

3.) Death hurries them away in a moment to destruction. They, for the most part, know not where they are, till "in hell they lift up their eyes." Luke xvi. 23.

(2.) Violently. Driving is a violent action; they are chased out of the world. They sought no other portion than the world, and at death they are dragged from it.

Notwithstanding, a wicked man may sometimes be willing to die: in a fit of passion, when passion gets the better of reason; when full of despair, or, when dreaming of happiness after death; who can give no scripture ground for their hope, yet have "no bands in their death."

(3.) Irresistibly. Death will take no refusal, nor admit of any delay. Consider,

2. Whence they are driven, and whither.

(1.) Out of this world, where they sinned, into the other world, where they must be judged. "After this the judgment."

(2.) To the society of the damned in hell. "The rich man also died."

(3.) Out of time into eternity. While time lasts, with them there is hope.

(4.) Out of all their specious pretences to piety, death strips them.

(5.) From all means of grace.

3. "They are driven away in their wickedness."

(1.) In their sinful, unconverted state. Having lived enemies to God, they die in a state of enmity to him. "In the gall of bitterness." Acts v. 23.

(2.) Loaded with guilt. Guilt is a bad companion in life, but how terrible will it be in death! We have seen the dark side of the cloud, let us now take a view of the bright side.

II. The death of the righteous. "The righteous hath hope."

1. They have a good friend before them. Jesus Christ, their best friend, is lord of that land to which death carrieth them. When Joseph sent for his father to come down to Egypt, and when Jacob saw the wagons, the Spirit of Jacob revived, he frankly resolves to take the journey. When the Lord calls a godly man out of this world, he sends him such a kind invitation, that, if he had faith to believe it, his spirit would revive at the prospect of death.

2. They shall have a safe passage to another world. They must indeed go through "the valley of the shadow of death;" (Ps. xxiii. 4;) it shall be a valley of hope to them. They shall not be driven, "but walk through it." Death can do them no harm. It cannot even hurt their bodies. Death is to them but a sleep. It cannot hurt their souls; the soul gets safe to paradise. "O death, where is thy sting?" 1 Cor. xv. 55.

3. They shall have a joyful entrance into the other world. "The day of their death is better than the day of their birth." It is the day of the pilgrim's coming home; the day on which the heir enters on the actual possession of his inheritance.

Use. 1. Take heed that ye entertain no hopes of heaven but what are built on a solid foundation.

2. Hasten, O sinners, out of your wickedness, if you would not at death be "driven away in your wickedness."

3. Be watchful, waiting for your change : like unto those who wait for the coming of their Lord.

4. Despatch the work of your day and generation with speed and diligence. "David, after he had served his own generation." "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do." "As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men." Gal. vi. 10.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF

JESUS CHRIST IN THE CHURCH.

None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; or, whether we die, we die unto the Lord ; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.—Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

THE apostle proposeth in the text, and in some of the preceding and following verses, to establish the doctrine of toleration. By toleration, we mean that disposition of a Christian which disposes him to give to another the same liberty that he wishes to enjoy. "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant ? For none of us liveth to himself."

I. The text lays before us the primitive condition of a Christian. It is a condition of dependence. "None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." What do we possess during our abode upon earth, which doth not absolutely depend on him who placed us here ?

Our *existence* is not ours. A few years ago we found ourselves in this world. A few years ago the world was nothing.

Our *fortune* is not ours. The most opulent often see that "riches make themselves wings, and fly away." We have seen the man, who had been "the greatest of all the men in the East," lying on a dunghill.

Our *reputation* is not ours. One moment's absence sometimes deposeth the glory of the most profound politician, or the most expert general, of a saint of the highest order.

Our *virtue* is not ours. Want of opportunity is often the cause why one, who openly professeth Christianity, is not an apostate, another an adulterer, another a murderer.

Our *reason* is not ours. While we possess it we are subject to distractions, to absence of thought, to suspension of intelligence.

Our *health* is not ours. The catalogue of those infirmities which destroy it makes whole volumes.

Our *life* is not ours. Winds, waves, heat, cold, aliments, vegetables, animals, nature, and each of its component parts, conspire to deprive us of it ; the youngest and strongest cannot assure himself of one year, one day, one hour, one moment of life. "None of us liveth to himself ; for, if we live, we are the Lord's."

Further, "No man dieth to himself. If we die, we are the Lord's." How absolute soever the dominion of one man over another may be, there is a moment in which both are on a level ; that moment comes

when we die. Death delivers a slave from the power of the tyrant. Death terminates all the relations that subsist between men in this life. But the relation of dependence which subsists between the Creator and his creatures, is an eternal relation. That world into which we enter when we die, is a part of his empire. These reflections are not quite sufficient to make us feel all our dependence; our vanity is mortified when we remember, that what we enjoy is not ours. He hath attached our felicity to one fibre, to one caprice, to one grain of sand. On what is your high idea of yourself founded? on your genius? And what is necessary to reduce the finest genius to a state of melancholy and madness? Must the earth quake? must the sea overflow its banks? No; there needs nothing but the displacing of one little fibre in your brain. On what is your high idea of yourself founded? On that self-complacency which fortune, rank, and pleasing objects that surround you, seem to contribute to excite? And what is necessary to dissipate your self-complacency! Must Heaven arm itself with thunder and lightning? Must all nature be shaken? No; one caprice is sufficient. On what is your lofty idea of yourself founded? on your health? But what is necessary to deprive you of your health? Earthquakes? No; one grain of sand is sufficient. What dependence! "Whether we live, or whether we die, we are the Lord's." This is the primitive condition of a Christian.

II. Our text points out the engagements of a Christian. Let us abridge our reflections. Remark,

1. In what state did Jesus Christ find us when he came into the world? "Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite." Ezek. xvi. 3. Let us leave the metaphor, and let us confine our attention to the meaning. When Jesus Christ came into the world, in what state did he find us? Descended from a long train of ancestors in rebellion against the laws of God, "having no hope, and being without God in the world." Eph. ii. 12.

2. On what condition Jesus Christ hath freed you from your miseries; and you will perceive, that "ye are not your own." 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. To what authority didst thou submit, by embracing the gospel? Didst thou say to Jesus Christ, Lord, I will be partly thine, and partly mine own? Him alone I acknowledge for a true Christian, who can say with St. Paul, although not in the same degree yet with equal sincerity, "I am crucified with Christ." Gal. ii. 20.

3. Consider what it cost Jesus Christ to deliver you from your wretched state. To deliver us from the strokes of divine justice, he must be "stricken and smitten of God." Isa. liii. 4.

4. Can it be difficult to persuade you on this article? Stretch your imaginations. Find, if you can, any circumstance in life, in which it would be happier to reject Christianity than to submit to it. In the calamities of life, it is delightful to belong to the Master who distributes them—who distributes them for our good. Rom. viii. 28. During the persecutions of the church, it is delightful to belong to a guardian who can curb our persecutors, and control every tyrant. Under a sense of our infirmities, it is delightful to belong to a Judge who "knoweth our frame;" Ps. ciii. 14; "who purgeth our infirmities, who will not break

a bruised reed." Under a recollection of our rebellion, it is delightful to belong to a Parent, who "spareth us as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Mal. iii. 17. To live to Jesus Christ, then, is the felicity of a Christian. But if it be a felicity to belong to Jesus Christ while we live, it is a felicity incomparably greater to belong to him when we die. We will conclude this meditation with this article, and it is an article that I would endeavour, above all others, to impress on your hearts, and to engage you to take home to your houses. I know a great many Christians who place their happiness in living to Jesus Christ; but how few have love enough for him to esteem it a felicity to die to him! To be Jesus Christ's in the hour of death, by condition, by engagement, and, above all, by inclination, are the only means of dying with delight. Criminal objects will punish you; they will represent death to you as the messenger of an avenging God. Lawful objects will distress you; pleasant fields, convenient houses, we must forsake you; natural relations, agreeable companions, faithful friends, we must give you up. Religious objects, which we are commanded above all others to love, will contribute to our anguish on a dying bed, if they have confined our love. But a believer, who loves Jesus Christ with a kind of love, which made St. Paul exclaim, "the love of God constraineth us," finds himself at the summit of his wishes at the approach of death. This believer, living in this world, resembles the son of a great king, whom some sad event tore from his royal parent in his cradle, who knows his parent only by the fame of his virtues. With what transport would such a son meet the moment appointed by his father for his return to his natural state!

I belong to God, says the believer, not only by his sovereign dominion over me as a creature; not only by that right, which, as a master, who hath redeemed his slave; but I belong to God, because I love him. I consider death as the period fixed for the gratifying of my most ardent wishes, the consummation of my highest joy. "Whilst I am at home in the body, I am absent from the Lord." 2 Cor. v. 6—8.

No, lawful objects! how strong soever the attachments that unite me to you may be, you are only streams of happiness, and I am going to the fountain of felicity. Neither shall ye, religious objects, detain me; you are only means, and death is going to conduct me to the end; you are only the road, to die is only to arrive at home. "Lord, I beseech thee, show me thy glory." Ex. xxxiii. 18. True, I shall no more partake of you, ye holy ordinances, that have so often procured me a heaven on earth; but I quit you, because I am going to receive immediate effusions of divine "pleasures at God's right hand for evermore, fulness of joy in his presence." Ps. xvi. 11. I quit you, because——

Love God, be the Lord's; be the Lord's by inclination, as you are his by condition and engagement. Then the miseries of this life will be tolerable, and the approach of death delightful.

OF THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

And he became a living soul.—Gen. ii. 7.

THOUGH the body die, when it dies the soul dies not; it survives the body, and not only lives after it, but lives for ever, it never dies: though the body without the soul be dead, yet the soul without the body is not dead. When the body returns to the earth and dust, from whence it sprung, the soul returns to God, its immediate author: the body may be killed by men, but not the soul; no man has any power over that, none but God that made it: the soul is immortal, it is not capable of death, that is, in a natural and proper sense.

When it is said the soul is immortal, it must be understood that it is so in its nature: and is not liable to death, either from any thing within itself, or without it: but not that it has such an immortality as God himself has, "who only hath immortality;" he has it of himself. Angels, and the souls of men, have their immortality of him, who has made them immaterial and immortal spirits; his immortality is without beginning, and any prior cause of it; theirs has a beginning from God, the first cause of them: his is independent; theirs depends on him, "in whom they live, and move, and have their being." That the soul of man is immortal, may be proved,

I. From the consideration of the soul itself—its original, nature, powers, and faculties.

1. From the original of it. It is not of men: "What is born of the flesh is flesh;" and not only carnal and sinful, but frail and mortal. "All flesh is grass," withering, decaying, and corruptible; it is the very breath of God, and has a similarity to him, particularly in immortality: "God breathed into man the breath of life." Gen. ii. 7. Elihu says, "The breath of the Almighty hath given me life," Job xxxiii. 4, a life that will never end. Hence God is described, as he that "formeth the spirit of man within him;" Zech. xii. 1; and as God is the former of the souls of men, so he is the supporter of them; he "upholds their souls in life." The most malicious and cruel persecutors can only "kill the body, and after that they have no more that they can do;" they cannot kill the soul. Luke xii. 4.

2. The immortality of the soul may be proved from its nature; which is,

(1.) Spiritual, of the same nature with angels, who are made spirits, spiritual substances. Heb. xii. 9, 23. The souls of men are of the same nature with angels, and they die not. Ps. civ. 4; Luke xx. 36; 1 Cor. ii. 11.

(2.) The soul of man is simple, unmixed, and uncompounded; it is not composed of flesh and blood, &c. as the body; a spirit has none of these.

(3.) It is immaterial, it is not composed of matter and form; nor is it a material form, educed out of the power of matter. Matter is divisible, discernible, may be cut to pieces: not so the soul; it is out of the reach of every slaughtering weapon; the sharp arrow cannot pene-

trate into it, nor the glittering spear pierce it, nor the two-edged sword divide it.

(4.) It has no contrary qualities which threaten with destruction ; it is neither hot nor cold ; neither moist nor dry.

(5.) The soul of man is made after the image, and in the likeness of God ; which chiefly consists in that it bears a resemblance to the Divine nature ; being the breath of God, it is a likeness to him, and particularly in its immortality.

3. The immortality of the soul may be proved from its powers and faculties.

(1.) Its understanding. "There is a spirit or soul in man," as Elihu says. And "the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding," Job xxii. 8 ; an intellective power and faculty of understanding things. Ps. xxxii. 9. Job xxxv. 11.

1.) The understanding of man can take in, and has knowledge of, things spiritual and incorporeal, immaterial, incorruptible, and eternal ; which it would not be capable of, if it were not of the same nature itself : the images of these things would not be impressed on it, nor would it be susceptible of them.

2.) The soul of man has knowledge of eternity itself ; though it may be observed, there is great difference in its apprehension of an eternity past, and of that which is to come : when it considers the former, it is soon at a loss, and at a full stop, is obliged to return and cannot go on ; it is like a bird that attempts to soar aloft, and take flights it is not used nor equal to, it flutters and hangs its wings, and is forced to descend. But when the soul fixes its thoughts on an eternity to come, how readily does it apprehend how that shall proceed without end ! with what pleasure does it roll over millions of ages in it ! The reason of this difference is, because the soul itself is not from eternity, but has a beginning ; whereas, it will endure to eternity and have no end.

3.) The knowledge which the mind and understanding of man has of things in the present state, is very imperfect, through the brevity of life ; and, therefore, it may be reasonably concluded that there is a future state in which the soul will exist, and its knowledge of things be more perfect. Arts and sciences have been cultivating many thousands of years, and in some ages great improvements have been made, and especially in later ones ; and yet there is room for farther improvements still : the knowledge of the best things, which good men have, as of God, of Christ, and of the mysteries of grace, is now very imperfect ; those that know most, know but in part, and see through a glass darkly ; but there is a state in which their souls will exist, when they shall see God face to face, see him as he is, and know as they are known.

4.) The knowledge the mind of man has of things now, is not in proportion to the powers that he possesses. How many are there that die in infancy, and as soon as they are born, whose reasoning powers are never called forth into action and exercise ! and how many die in childhood and youth, before these powers ripen, and are brought to any maturity ! Now, can it be thought these powers are bestowed upon them in vain ? There must be, then, an after state.

5.) Let a man know ever so much in this present life, he is desirous

of knowing more; let his acquisitions of knowledge be ever so large, after a life of studious search and inquiry, he is not satisfied, he still wants to know more; and what he has arrived unto is only to know this, that he knows but little. Now, this desire of knowledge is not implanted in man, by the Author of Nature, in vain; wherefore the soul must remain after death, when it will arrive to a more perfect knowledge of things.

(2.) The will of man is another faculty of the soul, the object and actings of which show it to be immortal.

1.) The will has for its object universal good. It naturally desires complete happiness, which some place in one thing and some in another, but it is not perfectly enjoyed by any. Now, there must be a future state in which true happiness will be attained, at least by some, or else the actings of the will about it will be in vain.

2.) God is the summum bonum, the chief good, the will of man rightly pitches upon, nor can it be satisfied with any thing less; good men choose him as their portion; but then he is not perfectly enjoyed as such in this life: wherefore, in order to this, the soul must remain after death, and be immortal.

3.) The will has its desires, and which desires, even the best, are not satisfied in this life. "Whom have I in heaven but thee?"

4.) The actions of the will are free, not forced by any creature; its acts are independent of the body, and can live without it.

5.) The will is not weakened, nor indeed any of the powers and faculties of the soul impaired by sickness and approaching death; "though the outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day;" yea, when the body is become speechless and near expiring, the faculties of the soul are in exercise; a man understands clearly what his friends about him say, and can, by a sign, by the lifting up his hand, signify his faith, hope, joy, and comfort; all which show that the soul sickens not with the body, nor becomes languid, nor dies with it.

II. The immortality of the soul may be proved from the light of nature and reason.

1. From the consent of all nations. Cicero says, that as we know by nature that there is a God, so we judge by the consent of all nations, that souls remain after death and are immortal; and in every thing, he says, the consent of all nations is to be reckoned the law of nature: so Seneca calls it, a public persuasion or belief.

2. This may be concluded from an extinction of man, soul and body, being abhorrent to man: the death of the body, though nature be reluctant to it, yet in many instances there has been a voluntary and cheerful submission to it; many good men have not loved their lives unto death.

3. It may be argued, from the natural desire in men to be religious, in some way or other; this is so natural to men, that some have chose rather to define man a religious, than a rational animal. All nations had their gods they worshipped.

4. There is a consciousness of sinning in men; guilt arises in their consciences on account of sin; even in the very heathen there is a conscience bearing witness to their actions.

5. Not only from the stings of conscience, but from the horror and

dread wicked men are sometimes seized with, as Felix. These things not only show that there is a Divine Being to whom men are accountable for their actions, but that there is a future state after death, in which men exist, when they shall be either in happiness or in misery.

6. The belief of this may be farther argued, from the providence of God, concerned in the distribution and disposal of things in this life, which is oftentimes very unequal; wicked men prosper, and good men are greatly afflicted. Ps. lxxiii. 2, 3, 12—14. Jer. xii. 1, 2. Good men, if they have hope in this life only, would be of all men the most miserable. Luke xvi. 25. 1 Cor. xv. 19. Wherefore,

7. The immortality of the soul may be concluded from the justice of God, who is the Judge of all the earth; for righteous is the Lord, though his judgments are not so manifest in this life: it is a righteous thing with God to render tribulation to them that trouble his people, and to fulfil the promises he makes to his saints.

8. If the soul be not immortal, but dies with the body, the brutes, in many things, have the advantage of men; and their state and condition in this life, is in many respects superior to ours: they are not so weak and helpless at first coming into the world; not subject to so many diseases; in some the senses are quicker, and they have more pleasure in the exercise of them.

III. The immortality of the soul may be proved from the sacred scriptures.

The soul, or spirit, is said to return to God that gave it. Eccl. xii. 7. "Fear not them which kill the body," &c. Matt. x. 28. This is to be proved,

1. From scripture doctrines: as from the doctrine of God's love to his people, which is everlasting. Jer. xxxi. 3. But this would not be true, if the souls of God's beloved died; hence it would follow, that death can, and does, separate from the love of God, contrary to the apostle's firm persuasion. Rom. viii. 38, 39. Also from the covenant of grace, which is said to be an everlasting covenant. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. But it is well known, that in all covenants there are confederates, and if one of the parties covenanting die, the covenant is at an end. The argument used by Christ to prove the resurrection of the dead from covenant-interest, Matt. xxii. 31, 32. Luke xx. 28, equally proves, or rather more clearly, the immortality of the soul. And particularly the immortality of the soul may be concluded from the grand promise of eternal life, in the covenant made before the world began. Tit. i. 2. 1 John ii. 25. But how can this promise be fulfilled, if the souls of those to whom it is made are not immortal? It may be argued from the doctrine of adoption, another blessing in the covenant, by virtue of which saints are heirs of an eternal inheritance. Likewise it may be argued from the doctrine of Christ respecting his work, the blessings of grace by him, and the services and benefits farther to be expected from him, as the redemption of the soul by the blood of Christ, which must be shed in vain, nor can it be called eternal redemption if the soul be not immortal. The doctrine of the judgment, whether particular or general, is a proof of the soul's immortality. Moreover, the doctrine of future rewards and punishments confirms this truth; for, if the soul be not immortal,

a good man cannot be rewarded in a way of grace, nor enjoy happiness in consequence of his piety, since there will be no subject of it remaining; nor a wicked man punished for his sins, for the same reason.

2. The immortality of the soul may be proved from scripture instances; as from the cases of Enoch and Elijah, who were translated soul and body, that they should not see death; as not in their bodies, so not in their souls. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who died, and yet after death were living, even in the times of Christ; also from the spirits in prison, in the times of the apostle Peter, who were disobedient to the warnings of Noah; and from the resurrection of some particular persons; who, after death, were raised and lived again, their souls which died not, being returned to them; 1 Kings xvii. 21, 22; and from the souls under the altar, whose bodies were killed; Rev. vi. 9, 10; and from the instances of persons committing their spirits to God at death. Ps. xxxi. 5. Luke xxiii. 46. Acts vii. 59. 1 Pet. iv. 16, 19. Lastly, all such scriptures which speak of the joys of heaven and the torments of hell.

IV. Answer some objections.

1. From reason. As,

(1.) That what has a beginning has an end. But this is not always true; angels have a beginning, but not an end; they die not.

(2.) The powers of the soul are said to decay, as the body decays; but this is only true of the powers of the sensitive soul, or part of man: not of the rational soul; not of the faculties of the understanding and will.

(3.) When a man dies, nothing is seen to go out of him but his breath, which vanishes away: but it is no wonder the soul should not be seen at its departure, since being a spirit, incorporeal and immaterial, it is invisible.

(4.) Some will have it, that this is only a contrivance of men in power, a piece of state policy to keep men in awe. But those men were either bad or good men: bad men would be unconcerned about ways and means to serve the cause of religion: and good men would never make use of a known lie, to serve such purposes.

2. From scripture. As,

(1.) From such scriptures which threaten the soul with death in case of sin. Gen. ii. 17. And it is expressly said, "the soul that sins shall die." Ezek. xviii. 4. To which may be replied—that there are various sorts of death: there is a spiritual or moral death; it is a being dead in trespasses and sins; and lies, not in the substance of the soul, but in the qualities of it. And there is an eternal death, the destruction of both body and soul in hell; this lies not in the destruction of the being of either, but in the misery of both: and there is a natural death, such as of the body, which the soul is not capable of.

(2.) From what is said of man, Ps. lxxviii. 39, and cxlvi. 4. This is expressive of the brevity of the bodily life of man.

(3.) From such passages which speak of man's going at death from whence he shall not return, Job x. 21, and xiv. 10. But these are to be understood of his returning to his house, and former manner of living and employment of life, chap. xii. 10. And when it is asked, where is he when he dies? it is easily answered, he is returned to the dust; and his soul has gone to God, and is either in bliss or woe.

4. From those places which speak of the dead as NOT : "Rachel was weeping for her children because they were not." Jer. xxxi. 15. But this cannot be meant of non-existence, either of soul or body.

ON THE

CONFLAGRATION OF THE UNIVERSE.

Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, &c.—2 Pet. iii. 11.

OUR apostle having, in the foregoing chapter, at large described the seducers and false teachers which in all ages trouble and perplex the church, he comes, in this chapter, to inform us, that those men would proceed to that height of impiety, as to scoff at the principles of religion, and to deride the expectations of a future judgment, which in the close of the chapter he describes; and exhorts Christians to the love and practice of universal holiness, as the best preparative for the day of the Lord; advising, that no profit may tempt, no pleasure entice, no power embolden, no privacy encourage, to do that thing which they would not then be found doing. "Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?"

I. What things are to be dissolved?

1. There are three things which never can be dissolved—the highest heaven, the lowest hell, and immortal spirits, such as men and angels; these are all everlasting in their own nature, or according to the unchangeable appointment of God, "These shall go away," &c. Matt. xxv. 46.

2. All things in the visible universe; such as the heavens, sun, moon, and stars. The earth, with all its various works, whether of nature or art, ver. 10, shall be dissolved. This appears by many strong arguments.

(1.) Divine predictions: "Heaven and earth shall pass away." Luke xxi. 33. "The harvest is the end of the world." Matt. xiii. 39.

(2.) God's gracious promise: "Whose voice then shook the earth," &c. Heb. xii. 26, 27.

(3.) It is made use of in scripture as a motive to greater degrees of holiness and obedience. "Love not the world." 1 John ii. 15—17. "The end of all things is at hand." 1 Pet. iv. 7.

(4.) The scripture mentions the latter and last times, and we are said to live under the last dispensation. 1 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Tim. iii. 1. 2 Cor. iv. 18.

(5.) It hath been the faith and expectation of the church in all ages. "They shall perish." Ps. cii. 26, 27. "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." 2 Pet. iii. 12.

II. Inquire how far, and in what sense, these things shall be dissolved.

Wise and learned men are of different opinions about this matter. It is agreed that they shall undergo a vast change; and that this change shall be effected by fire. Thus far the scripture is plain; but whether they shall be annihilated and reduced to nothing, or whether the disso-

lution shall only alter their present form, qualities, and uses, their substance still remaining; yet the latter of these opinions seems most plausible.

1. It must be allowed, whatever came in by the sin of man, such as thorns and thistles, and all the effects of the curse, shall totally be dissolved. "And there shall be no more curse." Rev. xxii. 3. Likewise all works of art, such as cities, houses, garments, &c. for there will be no use for them in another world.

2. The dissolution of the world is compared to the destruction of the old world by the flood, in the sixth verse of this chapter.

3. The words by which this change is expressed do not import their being turned into nothing. "They shall perish." Ps. cii. 26.

4. "Creation groans and travails in pain till now, and longs for the glorious liberty of the sons of God." Rom. viii. 19, 21. The whole visible universe, distinguished from the rational part. If it had reason would do it, certainly. There could be no reason for saying, "the creature shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption," if annihilation were meant in any text of scripture. Can final destruction be the object of desire, hope, and earnest expectation?

5. The Psalmist exhorts the whole creation to rejoice. "Let the heavens rejoice." Ps. xcvi. 11—13.

III. The causes of this astonishing dissolution.

1. The efficient cause is God himself, in the person of Jesus Christ. "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God," &c. Heb. i. 8, 10, 11.

2. The instrumental cause is fire, and it is to be taken literally, for it is opposed to water, by which the old world was destroyed. As to the kind and nature of it we are not curiously to inquire. "I beheld till the thrones were cast down." Dan. vii. 9, 10. Some think this fire will precede the day of judgment; and others that it will be a consequent of it. The scripture does not determine the point.

3. Its procuring cause is man's sin. "The earth is also defiled." Isa. xxiv. 5, 6.

4. The final causes are,

(1.) The glory of God's attributes: his truth will be glorified in accomplishing what he hath so often foretold; the glory of his unchangeableness and eternity shall appear: and what inconceivable power shall that be that shall melt the elements, fold up the capacious heavens as a scroll! The dissolving world will manifest his holiness and hatred of sin. "Our God is a consuming fire." Heb. xii. 29.

(2.) It shall be for the glory of Jesus the Mediator. He came in the form of a servant for our redemption, and was more reproached than any man; but this glorious appearing to judge the world, will wipe off all reproach and contempt.

The visible world must be renewed, to complete the first grant to man of dominion over the creatures lost by sin. "And they shall reign for ever." Rev. xxii. 5. The particular uses and ends of the new heaven and earth, that day shall fully discover. But it is objected, what use will the restoration of the brute creation be in the new earth? Answer.—If there be (as has been supposed) 8000 species of insects, who is able to inform us of what use 7000 of them are? If there be 6000 sorts of

birds, who can tell us of what use 5000 of those species are? If there be 400 sorts of beasts, to what use do 300 of them serve? Consider this, how little we know of even the present designs of God, and then you will not wonder that we know still less of what he designs to do in the new heaven and earth.

Inferences.

1. What a picture doth this afford us of the power of our Judge!

Who can resist his will? He will say, "and the sea shall be dry."

Isa. i. 2. "A God who removeth the mountains." Job ix. 5—7, 10.

2. Of the horrors of vice. Behold how far God carries his resentment against sin.

3. What a representation of the vanity of the present world! Yet vanity will invent refuges against the storm. All shall be dissolved.

4. Description of the world to come, new heavens.

5. Display of the excellence of piety. Ps. cii. 28.

OF THE

LAST AND GENERAL JUDGMENT.

We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.—2 Cor. v. 10.

THERE will be a judgment of men in a future state: which is two-fold; —1. A particular one; and which passes upon particular persons immediately after death; and to which it is generally thought the apostle has respect in Heb. ix. 27. "But after this," that is, death, "the judgment:" though if the words are to be connected with what follows, they may respect the judgment that will be at the second coming of Christ. —2. A general one, after the resurrection of the dead at the last day.

I. The proof of a general judgment.

1. From reason.

That the heathens, destitute of divine revelation, and who have only the light of nature to guide them, have entertained notions of a future judgment; or, however, when suggested to them, have readily assented to it, and embraced it. When the apostle Paul preached to the wise philosophers at Athens, upon his discoursing about the resurrection, some mocked, and others, more serious, said they would hear him again of that matter, not being satisfied with what he had said concerning it; but though he had most plainly and fully expressed the doctrine of God's judging the world in righteousness, they did not in the least contradict that, or make any objection to it.

(1.) From the accusations of conscience, and from the fears and terrors men are possessed of, and cannot free themselves from; as witness the consternation and dread of Belshazzar and Felix. Dan. v. 6. Acts xxiv. 25.

(2.) From the justice of God, which requires it; for it is easy to observe that the justice of God is not clearly displayed in the dispensation of things in the present state. Good men are afflicted, and evil men prosper.

(3.) From the relation men stand in to God, as creatures to a Creator.

(4.) From the judgments of God in this present life, and especially from the chastisements of good men, sometimes called a judging them. 1 Cor. xi. 32. "If judgment begin at the house of God," &c. 1 Pet. iv. 17.

(5.) The desire of the saints after it, implanted in their hearts by the Spirit of God; it is now their privilege that they can come to God, the Judge of all, in the righteousness of Christ—earnestly desire his coming to judgment; and importunately pray, saying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" Rev. xxii. 20.

2. The truth of this doctrine will more fully appear from divine revelation.

(1.) The prophecy of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, recorded in Jude 14, 15.

(2.) The character Abraham gives of Jehovah, as the Judge of all the earth, who will do right. Gen. xviii. 25.

(3.) It may be concluded from the faith of Job in his living Redeemer. Job xix. 25, 26.

(4.) Also from the declaration of Moses, in his song: "The Lord shall judge his people." Deut. xxxii. 36.

(5.) From the song of Hannah: "The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth." 1 Sam. ii. 10.

(6.) From some passages in the Psalms; in which God calls to the heavens and earth to be witnesses of his judging his people. Ps. l. 4—6; xcvi. 13; xcvi. 9.

(7.) From others in the book of Ecclesiastes, where it is said "God will judge the righteous and the wicked," &c. Eccles. iii. 17; xii. 14.

(8.) From various sayings of Christ, recorded by the evangelist. Matt. v, 21, 22; vii. 1; xi. 22, 24; and xii. 36, 41, 42.

(9.) From the sermons and epistles of the apostle Peter in Acts x. 42. 1 Pet. iv. 5; the apostle Paul in Acts xvii. 31; xxiv. 25. Rom. ii. 3, 5, 12, 16; xiv. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10. 2 Tim. iv. 8.

(10.) From Heb. vi. 2, where eternal judgment is mentioned as an article of a creed.

To all which may be added, the partial descriptions of the judgment, which are separately given, and which, when laid together, give a complete view of the whole, and show the judgment to be general. Matt. xxv. 31—46. Luke xix. 15—27.

II. The next inquiry is, who the person is that shall be the Judge?

God is, and will be Judge, and he only; hence we read of "God the Judge of all." Heb. xii. 23. And of "the judgment of God;" Rom. ii. 3, 5; and John saw a vision, Rev. xx. 12, but not God the Father; "for the Father judgeth no man," John v. 22, that is, no man separate and apart from his Son; nor in a visible form, for he never assumed any; but then he will judge the world by his Son. Acts xvii. 31. Rom. ii. 16. So that he is not excluded from a concern in the judgment; nor the Holy Spirit. The triune God will be the Judge, as to original authority, power, and right of judgment; but according to the economy settled between the three Divine persons among themselves, the work is assigned unto the Son; and is appropriate to him: hence

we read of appearing and standing before the judgment-seat of Christ. Rom. xiv. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10. 2 Tim. iv. 1. This work belongs to him as Mediator, and is a part of his office as such; it is what is committed to him by the Father, and which he has an authority from him to execute. John v. 22, 27. It is what he was appointed to in the council and covenant of God. Acts x. 42. It is a branch of his kingly office; "then shall the King say to them on his right hand." Matt. xxv. 34, 41.

1. It is highly proper that the Judge of all the earth should be God. Omniscience is necessary to this work, which is proper to God; for all the works, words, and thoughts of men, must be known by him, in order to judge them. Wisdom and sagacity are necessary to a judge. Solomon, by his judgment between the two harlots, became very famous and respectable among his people; but a greater than Solomon is here: one who is the all-wise God, the wisdom of God, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and on whom the spirit of knowledge and wisdom rests. Almighty power is likewise requisite in the Judge of the world, to do what must and will be done by him: as, to raise the dead, summon all before him, and not only pronounce the decisive sentences on them, but carry them into execution; for which purpose, he is said to come with power, as well as with great glory. Strict justice and faithfulness are qualifications in a temporal judge, who is to execute true judgment; is not to be bribed nor to respect persons; nor to pass sentence in a cause through favour and affection; and such a Judge, and one infinitely more so, is necessary to judge the world in righteousness, and the people with equity; and such an one is Jesus Christ the righteous. Isa. xi. 3—5.

2. That Christ should appear in human nature when he comes to judge the world, is highly necessary; for "God has appointed to judge the world by that man whom he has ordained:" so that Christ, as man, must be concerned in the judgment of the world; yea, the Father has given him authority to execute it, "because he is the Son of man;" Acts. xvii. 31. John v. 27; because he has assumed human nature, and so can appear visibly in it, as it is proper a judge should be visible. The sight of a judge is very striking; it commands awe and reverence in all; it fills the criminal with terror, and the just man with pleasure: "every eye shall see him."

III. The persons that will be judged—angels and men: as to good angels, nothing is said of the judgment of them in scripture.

How far their obedience to God, and the faithful services they have performed to men at his command, may be brought into judgment to receive their just praise and commendation, I will not say: but the judgment spoken of in scripture chiefly concerns men, good and bad; "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked." Eccles. iii. 17.

1. The righteous: and these shall be judged first alone; for "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment with them, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous," and they will be first judged; their judgment will be despatched first, as represented in Matt. xxv. Besides, they will be raised first; "the dead in Christ will rise first," 1 Thess. iv. 16, even a thousand years before the rest; and it is not reasonable to suppose that their judgment will not precede, but be deferred until the

rest are raised. Besides, Christ will judge the quick and the dead, the living saints changed, and the dead ones raised, at his appearing and kingdom.

2. The wicked will be judged; such who have indulged themselves in the gratification of sinful pleasures, and may have been so hardened in sin as to imagine they shall escape the judgment of God; yet they shall not; Eccles. iii. 17; xi. 9. Rom. ii. 3—5; even all the wicked shall be judged. These are the dead John saw stand before God, small and great; all the wicked dead, from the beginning of the world to the end of it.

(1.) All their works and actions, whether good or evil, will be brought into judgment. Eccles. xii. 14.

(2.) All the words of men, every hard speech against Christ and his people; yea, every idle word. Jude 15. Matt. xii. 35—37. Nay,

(3.) Every thought, good or bad; for “there is a book of remembrance written for those that thought on the name of the Lord.” Mal. iii. 16. “God will judge the secrets of men;” not only their secret works, but their secret thoughts. Rom. ii. 16. 1 Cor. iv. 5.

IV. The rule of judgment, according to which it will proceed, and from whence the evidence will be taken, are certain books opened. Rev. xx. 12. The same is observed, Dan. vii. 10.

1. The book of Divine omniscience will be opened. Christ the Judge, who is God over all, knows all persons; the eyes of his omniscience are every where, throughout the whole world, beholding the evil and the good. “I will come near to you to judgment,” &c. Mal. iii. 5.

2. This book seems to be the same with the book of remembrance in Mal. iii. 16; not that God needs any thing to assist and refresh his memory; he has a strong memory, to remember the sins which are written by him in his book, with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond. Jer. xvii. 1.

3. The book of the creatures, or creation, will be opened, and which will be produced as witnesses against the sinner.

4. The book of providence will be opened: the providential goodness of God extends to all his creatures; and such as have despised the riches of his goodness, shall have it brought as an evidence against them. Rom. ii. 4, 5.

5. The book of the scriptures will be opened, both of law and gospel: “they that have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law;” nay, the gentiles will judge them, who by the letter and circumcision transgress the law; that is, will rise up in judgment against them, and condemn them. Rom. ii. 12, 27. Such who have lived under the gospel dispensation, and have neglected, despised, and rejected the gospel of Christ, will be judged according to it, and by it. “The word,” says Christ, “that I have spoken, the same shall judge him” that rejects it, “in the last day.” John xii. 48.

6. The book of conscience: in this are recorded the actions of men; and from thence are they to be brought forth upon occasion; and which either accuses or excuses.

Now the dead will be “judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works.” Rev. xx. 12.

V. The properties of this judgment, as may be gathered from what has been said about it, and from express passages of scripture.

1. It is future, yet to come. Acts xxiv. 25.

2. It is certain; purpose and prophecy make it so. God has, in his purposes, appointed a day for it, and he will keep it; and his purpose is never disannulled. Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of it, as well as others; and the word of prophecy is a sure one. Eccles. xi. 9.

3. It will be universal, both as to persons and things. All men will be judged.

4. It will be a righteous judgment; so it is called. The world will be judged in righteousness. Rom. ii. 5.

5. It will be the last judgment. It will be when the last trump shall sound, that the dead shall rise, in order to be judged; and it will be at the last day. 1 Cor. xv. 52. John xii. 48.

6. It is called eternal judgment, Heb. vi. 2, not only because it will be a long time about, but because it will issue in the final state of men, either in their everlasting destruction, or in their everlasting happiness. Matt. xxv. 46.

CHRIST ADMIRER AND GLORIFIED

IN HIS SAINTS.

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe.—2 Thess. i. 10.

How mean and contemptible soever our Lord might appear heretofore on earth, yet there is a day coming when he shall make a glorious figure, in the sight of men and angels. How little soever the saints may be esteemed in our day, and look poor and despicable in an ungodly world, yet there is an hour approaching when they shall be glorious beyond all imagination, and Christ himself shall be glorified in them.

The natural inquiry that arises here is this—What particular instances of the grace of Christ in his saints shall be the matter of our admiration, and his glory in that day?

I. It is a matter of pleasing wonder, that persons of all characters should have been united in one faith, and persuaded to trust in the same Saviour, and embrace the same salvation.

For some of all sorts shall stand in that blessed assembly. Then it shall be a fruitful spring of wonder and glory, that men of various nations and ages, of different tempers, capacities, and interests; of contrary educations, and contrary prejudices, should believe one gospel and trust in one deliverer. That the sprightly, the studious, and the stupid; the wise and the foolish, should relish and rejoice in the sublime truths, not only concerning the true God, but also concerning Jesus the Redeemer; that the barbarian and the Roman, the Greek and the Jew, should approve and receive the same doctrines of salvation.

Astonishing spectacle! when the dark and savage inhabitants of Africa, and our forefathers, the rugged and warlike Britons, from the ends

of the earth, shall appear in that assembly, with some of the polite nations of Greece and Rome, and each of them shall glory in having been taught to renounce the gods of their ancestors, and the demons which they once worshipped, and shall rejoice in Jesus the king of Israel, and in Jehovah the everlasting God.

The conversion of the gentile world to Christianity is a matter of glorious wonder, and shall appear to be so in that great day. Here shall stand a believing atheist, and there a converted idolater, as monuments of the almighty power of his grace.

There shall shine also in that assembly, here and there, a prince, and a philosopher, though not many wise, not many noble; and they shall be matter of wonder and glory. That princes, who love to control, should bow their sceptres and their souls to the royalty and Godhead of the poor man of Nazareth! that the heathen philosophers, who had been used only to yield to reason, should submit their understanding to divine revelation!

It shall raise our holy wonder, too, when we shall behold some of the Jewish priests and pharisees, who became converts to the Christian faith, adorning the triumph of that day. That those who thought they were righteous, and boasted in it, should renounce their boastings and their righteousness, and learn to expect salvation and life for themselves, from the death and righteousness of another; that they who once called the cross of Christ folly and weakness, should come to see the wisdom and power of God, in a crucified man, and believe him, who hung upon a tree, to be Immanuel, "God manifest in the flesh." 1 Tim. iii. 16.

Surely shall men and angels say, in that day, "These were the effects of an almighty power; it was the work of God the Saviour, and it is marvellous in our eyes." With united voices shall all the saints confess, "flesh and blood has not revealed this unto us." Matt. xvi. 27.

Come, all ye saints of these latter ages, upon whom the end of the world is come, raise your heads with me, and look far backwards, even to the beginning of time, and the days of Adam; for the believers of all ages, as well as of all nations shall appear together in that day, and acknowledge Jesus the Saviour, according to the brighter or darker discoveries of the age in which they lived. The ancient patriarchs, with the Jewish prophets and saints, shall make a splendid appearance there: "One hundred and forty-four thousand are sealed among the tribes of Israel." Those of old embraced the gospel in types and shadows; but now their eyes behold Christ Jesus, the substance and the truth. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises." Heb. xi. 13. They died in hope of his salvation, and they shall rise in the blessed possession of it.

Behold Abraham appearing there, the father of the faithful, "who saw the day of Christ, and rejoiced to see it:" John viii. 56: his elder family, the pious Jews, surround him there, and we, his younger children among the gentiles, shall stand with him as the followers of his faith. How shall we both rejoice to see this brightest day of the Son of man, and congratulate each other's faith, while our eyes meet and centre in him, and our souls triumph in the sight!

II. It is a farther occasion of pleasing wonder that so many wicked,

obstinate wills of men, and so many perverse affections, should be bowed down, and submit themselves to the holy rules of the gospel.

This is another instance of the grace of Christ, and shall be the subject of our joyful admiration. Every son and daughter of Adam by nature is averse to God, and inclined to sin, a child of disobedience and death. Eph. ii. 2. There is a new miracle wrought by Christ in every instance of converting grace, and he shall have the glory of them all in that day.

Then shall one say, "I was a sensual sinner, &c. The grace of God my Saviour appeared to me, and taught me to deny worldly lusts, which I once thought I could never have parted with. I loved my sins as my life, but he has persuaded and constrained me to cut off a right hand."

"I was envious against my neighbour," shall another say, "and my temper was malice and wrath; revenge was mingled with my constitution, and I thought it no iniquity; but I bless the name of Christ my Redeemer, who in the day of his grace turned my wrath into meekness; he inclined me to love even mine enemies."

Then a third shall confess, "I was a profane wretch, a swearer, a blasphemer; I hoped for no heaven, and I feared no hell; but the Lord seized me in the midst of my rebellions, and sent his arrow into my soul; he made me feel the stings of an awakened conscience, and constrained me to believe there was a God, and a hell: till I cried out, astonished, 'What shall I do to be saved?'" Acts xvi. 30.

A fourth shall stand up and acknowledge in that day, "And I was a poor carnal and covetous creature, who made this world my God, and abundance of money was my heaven; but he cured me of this vile idolatry of gold, taught me how to obtain treasures in the heavenly world, and to forsake all on earth."

There shall be no doubt or dispute in that day, whether it was the power of our own will, or the superior power of divine grace, that wrought the blessed change, and turned a lion into a lamb, a grovelling earth-worm into a bird of paradise, and a covetous, or malicious sinner, into a meek and heavenly saint. The grace of Christ shall be so conspicuous in every glorified believer in that assembly, that with one voice they shall all shout to the praise and glory of his grace: "Not unto us, O Lord!" Ps. cxv. 1.

III. It shall be a matter of our wonder, and the glory of Christ in that day, that so many thousand guilty wretches should be made righteous by one righteousness, cleansed in one laver from all their iniquities, and sprinkled unto pardon and sanctification, with the blood of one man, Jesus Christ.

See the great multitude that no man can number, Rev. vii. 9, 10; they all "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," ver. 14.

It is a matter of wonder to us now on earth, that the blessed Son of God, who is one with the Father, should stoop so low as to unite himself to a mortal nature, &c. But when we see him in his native glory and lustre, his acquired dignities, and all the honours of heaven heaped upon him, it will raise our wonder high, to think that such a one should once

"humble himself to the death of the cross." Then shall the multitude of the saved join in that song, "To him that loved us." Rev. i. 5, 6. "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." Rev. v. 12.

Then shall those blessed words of scripture appear and shine in full glory, "If by one man's offence death reigned by one." Rom. v. 17, 19, 21. Then shall our blessed Lord shine in the complete lustre of that incommunicable name, JEHOVAH TZIDKENU, "the Lord our Righteousness." Jer. xxiii. 6.

And not only the atonement and salvation itself shall be the subject of our glorious admiration, but the way and manner how sinners partake of it, shall minister farther to our wonder, and to the glory of Christ; that such a world of poor miserable creatures should be saved from hell, by believing or trusting in grace. "Therefore it is of faith, and not of works, that it might be of grace." Rom. iv. 16. Yet this saving faith is the spring of shining holiness in every believer. Duties and virtues are not left out of our religion, when faith is brought into it.

IV. That a company of such feeble Christians should maintain their course towards heaven, through so many thousand obstacles.

This shall be another subject of admiration, and yield a farther revenue of glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, for he is their righteousness and their strength also. "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel glory in that day, as their strength and their salvation." Isa. xlv. 24, 25. They have broke through all their difficulties, and were "able to do all things through Christ strengthening them." Phil. iv. 13.

Behold that noble army, with palms in their hands; once they were weak warriors, yet they overcame mighty enemies, and have gained the victory and the prize; enemies rising from the earth, and from hell, to tempt and to accuse them; but "they overcame by the blood of the Lamb." Rev. xii. 11. What a divine honour shall it be to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation, that weak Christians should subdue their strong corruptions, and get safe to heaven, through a thousand oppositions, within and without! They are "made more than conquerors through him that has loved them." Rom. viii. 37. Then shall the faith, and courage, and patience of the saints have a blessed review; and it shall be told before the whole creation, what strife and wrestlings a poor believer has passed through in a dark cottage, a chamber of long sickness, or perhaps in a dungeon. Then shall appear the bright scene, which St. Peter represents as the event of sore trials. 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

Behold that illustrious troop of martyrs, and some among them of the feeblest sex and of tender age; how that women should grow bold in faith, even in the sight of torments; and children, with a manly courage, should profess the name of Christ in the face of angry and threatening rulers. Every soldier in that triumphing army shall ascribe his conquest to the grace of the Lord, his leader, and lay down all his trophies at the feet of his Saviour, with humble acknowledgments and shouts of honour.

Almost all the saved number were, at some part of their lives, weak in faith; and yet by the grace of Christ, they held out to the end, and are crowned. "I was a poor trembling creature," shall one say, "but I

was confirmed in my faith and holiness by the gospel of Christ; or I rested on a naked promise, and found support, because Christ was there, and he shall have the glory of it."

"O, what an Almighty arm is this," shall the believer say, "that has borne up so many thousands of poor sinking creatures, and lifted their heads above the waves!" The spark of grace, that lived many years in a flood of temptations, and was not quenched, shall then shine bright, to the glory of Christ, who kindled and maintained it.

Then shall it be gloriously evident, that he has conquered Satan, and kept the hosts of hell in chains, when it shall appear that he has made poor trembling believers victorious over all the powers of darkness, for the Prince of Peace has bruised him under his feet.

V. There is more work for our wonder and joy, and more glory for our blessed Lord, when we shall see that so many dark and dreadful providences were working together in mercy, for the good of the saints.

It is because Jesus Christ had the management of them all put in his hand; and we shall acknowledge "he has done all things well." Rom. viii. 28. All things have wrought together for good. It is the voice of Christ, to every saint in sorrow, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." John xiii. 7. "I saw not then," saith the Christian, "that my Lord was curing my pride, by such an abasing providence; that he was weaning my heart from sensual delights, by such sharp and painful wounds; but now I behold things in another light, and give thanks and praises to my Divine Physician."

We shall look back upon the hours of our impatience, and be ashamed, when we shall stand upon the eternal hills of paradise, and cast our eyes back upon yonder transactions of time. We shall then, with pleasure and thankfulness, confess, that the Captain of our salvation was much in the right to lead us through so many sufferings, and we were much in the wrong to complain of his conduct.

Bear up your spirits, then, ye poor, afflicted, distressed souls, who are wrestling through difficult providences in the dark. Bear up but a little longer, "he that shall come will come:" he will set all his conduct in a fair light, and you shall say, "Blessed be the Lord, and all his government."

VI. That heaven should be so well filled out of such a hell of sin and misery as this world is, shall be another delightful reflection, full of wonder and glory.

Take a short survey of mankind, how all flesh has corrupted its ways before God, and every imagination of the thought of man's heart is only evil; there is none righteous. Look round about you, and see how iniquity abounds; look into your own hearts, ye sinners, see what a hell lies there.

Look round the world again, and survey the miseries of this earth; as many calamities as there are creatures, and perhaps ten times more. See all this, and wonder at the grace of Christ, that has taken a colony out of this miserable world, and made a heaven of it.

We shall, many of us, be a wonder to each other as well as to ourselves; and we shall all review and admire the grace of Christ in and towards us all. The melancholy Christian shall wonder that ever such

a sinner as himself was brought to heaven; and the uncharitable shall wonder how such a sinner as his neighbour came there. The narrow-souled Christian, who said his neighbour would be damned, for want of some party notions, shall confess his uncharitable mistake, and shall wonder at the abounding mercy of Christ, which has pardoned those errors in his neighbour, for which he had excommunicated and condemned him.

Oh, what honour shall it add to the overflowing mercy of Christ, what joy and wonder to all the saints, to see Paul the persecutor and blasphemer there, and Peter who denied the Lord that bought him, and Mary Magdalen, that impure sinner! See what a foul and shameful catalogue; what children of iniquity are at last made heirs and possessors of heaven! "The fornicators and idolaters, the thieves and the covetous, the drunkards, the revilers, and the extortioners." 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. Such they were in the days of ignorance and heathenism, fit fuel for the fire of hell: and in those circumstances they are utterly excluded from the kingdom of God, but now they find a place in that blessed assembly; and the converting grace of Christ is admired and glorified, that could turn such sinners into saints. With what adoration and wonder shall we cry out, "And such were some of these happy ones, but they are sanctified!" (ver. 11.) "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us!"

VII. There is another glory and wonder added to this illustrious scene, and gives honour to our blessed Saviour, and that is, that so many vigorous, beautiful, and immortal bodies should be raised at once out of the dust, with all their old infirmities left behind them.

Not one ache nor pain, not one weakness nor disease, among all the glorified millions. As the Israelites came out of their bondage in Egypt, so shall the army of saints from the prison of the grave, and "not one feeble among them." Ps. cv. 37.

Here I might run many sorrowful divisions, and travel over the large and thorny field of sickness and pains that attend human nature. But these were all buried when the body went to the grave, and they are buried for ever. The body "was sown in weakness, but it is raised in power; it was sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory," through the power of the second Adam. 1 Cor. xv. 43—45; Rom. viii. 11.

Then shall Christ appear to be Sovereign and Lord of death, when such an endless multitude of old and new captives are released at his word, and the grave has restored its prey. Surely Jesus, in that day, shall be acknowledged as the Sovereign of nature, when at the word of his command, a new creation shall arise, all perfect and immortal.

VIII. The last instance I shall mention, wherein Christ shall be admired in his saints, is this: they shall appear in that day as so many images of his person, and as so many monuments of the success of his office.

Is the blessed Jesus a great prophet, and the teacher of his church? These are the persons that have learned his divine doctrine; these are the disciples of his school; and by his word, and by his Spirit, they have been taught to know God.

Is Jesus a great High Priest, both of sacrifice and intercession?

Behold all these souls, an endless number, purified from their defilements by the blood of his cross, washed and made white in that blessed laver, and reconciled to God by his atoning sacrifice : behold the power of his intercession, in securing millions from the wrath of God, and in procuring for them every divine blessing.

Is Jesus the Lord of all things, and the king of his church ? Behold his subjects waiting on him, a numerous and loyal multitude, who have the laws of their King engraven on their souls.

Is he the Captain of salvation ? See what a blessed army he has listed under his banner of love ; and they have followed him through all the dangers of life and time under his conduct. These are the chosen, the called, the faithful. They have sustained many a sharp conflict, many a dreadful battle, and they are, at last, "made more than conquerors, through him that has loved them." Rom. viii. 37. They attribute all their victories to his wisdom, &c. They fought under the banner, conduct, and influence of the Prince of Life, the King of Righteousness, who is always victorious, and has a crown in his hand for every conqueror.

Is Jesus the great example of his saints ? Behold the virtues and graces of the Son of God, copied out in all his followers. As he was, so were they in this world, "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Heb. vii. 26. As he now is, so are they, glorious in holiness, and divinely beautiful. They were unknown here on earth, even as Christ himself was unknown : this is the day appointed to reveal their works and their graces.

And not their souls only, but their glorified bodies also are framed in his likeness. What grace and grandeur dwell in each countenance ! As thou art, O blessed Jesus ! so shall they be in that day, all of them resembling the children of a king. Vigour and health, beauty and immortality, shine and reign throughout all that blessed assembly. Phil. iii. 20, 21.

To conclude.

1. How mistaken is the judgment of flesh and sense, in the things that relate to Christ and his saints ! The Son of God himself was abused and scorned by the blind world ; they esteemed him as "one smitten of God and unbeloved, and they saw no beauty nor comeliness in him." Isa. liii. 2. As for the saints, they find no more honour nor esteem among men than their Lord ; they are many times called and counted "the filth of the world." 1 Cor. iv. 13.

But when the great appointed hour is come, and Jesus shall return from heaven, "with a shout of the archangel, and the trump of God," 1 Thess. iv. 16, when he shall call up his saints from their beds of dust and darkness, and make the graves resign those prisoners of hope ; when they shall all gather together around their Lord, a bright and numerous army, shining and reflecting the splendours of his presence ; how will the judgments of flesh and sense be confounded at once, and reversed with shame ! Is this the man that was loaded with scandal, that was buffeted with scorn ? Is this the person that hung on the cursed tree, and expired under agonies of pain and sorrow ? Amazing sight ! How majestic, how divine his appearance ! And are these the men that were under the

mockery of the world? that wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, in dens and caves of the earth? Surprising appearance! How illustrious! how full of glory! Oh that such a meditation might awaken us to judge more by faith!

One great design of the day of judgment is, to advance and publish the glory of Christ. He shall come on purpose to be glorified in his saints; the whole creation was made by him, and for him; the transactions of providence, grace, and justice, are managed for his honour, and the joyful and terrible affairs of the day of judgment are designed to display the majesty and the power of Jesus the King, the wisdom and equity of Jesus the Judge, and the grace and truth of Jesus the Saviour.

If the messengers of the churches are called the glory of Christ, as in 2 Cor. viii. 23, with all the weaknesses, and sins, and follies, that attend the best of them here, much more shall they be his glory hereafter, when they shall have no spot nor blemish found upon them. The saints shall reflect glory on each other, and all of them cast supreme lustre on Christ their head.

2. This discourse gives great encouragement to the greatest sinners to hope for mercy, and to the weakest saints to hope for victory and salvation. Such sort of subjects of the grace of Christ shall yield him some of the brightest rays of glory at the last day. Yet, sinners, let me charge you here, never to hope for this happiness without solemn repentance, and an entire change of heart unto holiness; for an unholy soul would be a fearful blemish in that assembly, and a disgrace to our Lord Jesus. Christians, I would charge you, also, never to hope for the happiness of this day without battle and conquest, for all the members of that assembly must be overcomers; but where there is a hearty desire and longing after grace and salvation, let not the worst of sinners despair, nor the weakest believer let go his hope, for they are such as you and I, in whom Christ will be magnified in that day. 1 Tim. i. 13—16. 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

3. Matter of consolation and joy to two sorts of Christians.

To the poor, mean, and despised followers of Christ, in whom Christ himself is despised by the ungodly world. Read my text and believe that in you Christ shall be glorified and admired, when with a million of angels, he shall descend from heaven. Little and despicable as you are in the esteem of proud sinners, they shall behold your Lord exalted on his throne, and you sitting among the honourable at his right hand, while they shall rage afar off, and gnash their teeth at your glory.

There is comfort, also, in my text, to those who mourn for the dishonour of Christ in the world. Those lively members of the mystical body, who sympathise with the blessed Head under all the reproaches that are cast upon him and his gospel, who groan under the load of scandal that is thrown upon Christ in an infidel age, open your eyes, and look forward to this glorious day; this day, to which Enoch, the first of all the prophets, and John, the last of all the apostles, direct our faith. Read their own words. Jude 14, 15. Rev. i. 7. Bear up your hearts, ye mourners, and support your hopes with the promise of the Lord, "Again, a little while, and ye shall see me; ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the throne of his glory." Matt. xxv. 31. "Then shall your

hearts rejoice" in his honours and your own; "and this joy no man taketh from you." John xvi. 19—22. And while he repeats his promise with his last words in the Bible, "Surely, I come quickly," let every soul of us echo to the voice of our Beloved, "Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus!" Rev. xxii. 20.

THE FINAL STATE OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

The righteous into life eternal.—Matt. xxv. 46.

THERE is a state of happiness, which the spirits, or souls, of just men enter into immediately after their separation from the body. But after the resurrection (which is of the saints into everlasting life, and therefore called the resurrection of life) and the general judgment is over, and the invitation given, "Come, ye blessed," &c. then the righteous shall go into life eternal; which is the state we shall now consider: and,

I. The state of happiness itself.

That good men shall enjoy a state of happiness in the world to come is evident; for "godliness has the promise of that life which is to come," 1 Tim. iv. 8, of happiness in it. And this may be made to appear in some respects,

1. From the light of nature and reason.

Though the kind of happiness is not to be discovered and demonstrated by it, yet some general notion of future happiness may be evinced from it.

(1.) A general notion of happiness after death has obtained among the wiser sort of heathens, who have had only the light of nature to guide them, unless some general traditions transmitted to them, especially among those who have given any credit to the immortality of the soul. Hence they speak of the Elysian fields, and the islands of the blessed, as the seat and habitation of the pious after death, and which they describe after a carnal and earthly manner; as grassy plains and flowery meads, and as abounding with all manner of delicious fruits, and as in a most temperate climate, free of all wintry weather, and blustering storms, and scorching heats.

(2.) From a natural desire in mankind after happiness, and which is universal; and yet it is certain, it is not attained in this present life, though eagerly sought for, one way or another. Some seek for it in natural wisdom, some in wealth, others in the honours of the world, and others in the gratification of sensual appetites; but is never found to satisfaction in either; and, as abundantly appears, from the first and second chapters in Ecclesiastes, this is only found in God, the chief good: and that not to perfection in this life. Now, either this desire is planted in vain, which is unreasonable to suppose, or there is a future state of happiness for the virtuous.

(3.) From the unequal distribution of things in the present state,

which makes the providence of God often very intricate, and which cannot be solved without admitting a future state. "Here wicked men are often exalted, and the righteous afflicted." Ps. lxxiii. It is reasonable to suppose, that those who have suffered in the cause of virtue should afterwards be rewarded.

2. From divine revelation ; by which life and immortality are brought to light, or an immortal life of happiness is set in the clearest light ; and which may be strongly concluded,—

(1.) From the promise of God concerning it. This is the promise, the grand and principal promise, and which includes all the rest. He, *i. e.* "God hath promised us," in the covenant of grace, "even eternal life." John x. 28. This promise was given early, even before the world began, and by that God that cannot lie.

(2.) From the preparation of this happiness for believers. This consists of things unseen, unheard of, &c. prepared for them that love him. "A kingdom prepared." Matt. xxv. 34.

(3.) From Christ's actual possession of it for his people, in their name ; and from the preparation he is making of it for them. He is entered into heaven as their forerunner ; has taken possession of it in their name as their head and representative. "He has gone to prepare a place for them." John xiv. 3. He will, he has assured them, come again, and secure them to himself, that where he is, there they shall be also.

(4.) From the gospel call to eternal happiness. Lay hold on eternal life. Whereunto thou art also called. "The God of all grace, that hath called you to his eternal glory." 1 Pet. v. 10.

(5.) From the grace of God implanted in the heart, and the earnest of the spirit there. "A well of water springing up into everlasting life," John iv. 14, the earnest of your inheritance.

(6.) From the present experience of the saints, from those foretastes they sometimes have of future glory ; like the Israelites, they have some clusters of Canaan's grapes, some of the fruits of the good land ; they now receive the first-fruits of the Spirit, which encourage them to hope for a glorious harvest. At certain seasons, they have such communion with their God, that they are at the gate and suburbs of heaven.

(7.) From the desires of the saints after future happiness. They desire to be with Christ, to be present with the Lord. Phil. i. 23. They press towards the mark.

(8.) From the assurance some of the saints have had of it. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and others, all died in the faith of the better country they were seeking. The Psalmist expresses a strong faith, that God would receive him to glory. The apostle says, "we know," we are well assured, "that we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

(9.) This happiness is begun already in this life ; in regeneration men pass from death into life ; and "this is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God."

(10.) There are instances of the saints already in heaven ; and some in their body, as well as their souls ; as Enoch and Elijah ; and, as it is highly probable, the saints that arose at Christ's resurrection, and went with him to heaven. Luke xiii. 28 ; xvi. 22.

Various are the names by which this happiness is expressed. It is called heaven, for there is this happiness reserved in heaven ; it goes by the name of Paradise, in allusion to the garden of Eden, a place of pleasure and delight ; it is represented as a place of light, the light of life, the inheritance of the saints in light. It needs no artificial light to illuminate it ; God and the Lamb are the light thereof : it is signified by a house ; a Father's house ; a house not made with hands ; it is said to be a city ; a city of God's preparing : it is called the better country ; and as a state, it is called an inheritance, in allusion to the land of Canaan, which was distributed by lot : a kingdom, the kingdom of God ; a crown, a crown of righteousness : it is expressed by glory itself ; a weight of glory : it has the name of peace : "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright:" it is signified by rest, which remains for the people of God : it is called the joy of the Lord, a joy that cannot be taken from them, "a fulness of joy, a joy unspeakable and full of glory." 2 Pet. i. 8.

All of which certainly imply a freedom from all evils, afflictions, temptations, persecutions, and the possession of all good, the enjoyment of God himself as their portion, a being with Christ ; having the society of angels, and the spirits of just men, and joining them in adoring the divine perfections, from which will arise the greatest joy and felicity—joy unspeakable. "The redeemed of the Lord shall now come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy." Isa. xxxv. 10.

II. The eternity of this happiness.

Which will appear,

1. By its being frequently called eternal life, everlasting life, a life that will never end. It is said of Methusalem, the oldest man, that he lived so many years, and that he died ; but "he that liveth and believeth in Christ shall never die." John xi. 26.

2. It is a glory, and it is called eternal glory ; "an eternal weight of glory, a crown of glory that fadeth not away." 2 Cor. iv. 17. 1 Pet. v. 4.

3. It is "an house eternal in the heavens, everlasting habitations." 2 Cor. v. 1. Luke xvi. 9.

4. It is an inheritance, and "an eternal inheritance, incorruptible, and that fadeth not." 1 Pet. i. 4.

5. "It is a city," and a continuing city ; here the saints have none. Heb. xiii. 14.

6. It is "a kingdom," and "an everlasting one." Dan. vii. 27.

7. It is "a country," in which the saints are not sojourners ; "a better country, a heavenly one." Heb. xi. 16 ; xii. 22.

8. It is a "being with Christ, and being for ever with the Lord." Eternity infinitely adds to the happiness of this state. 1 Thess. iv. 17.

NO NIGHT IN HEAVEN.

And there shall be no night there.—Rev. xxi. 25.

It is the voice of all nature, as well as the word of Solomon, light is sweet, and a pleasant thing to enjoy the sunbeams. Light gives a glory

and beauty to every thing that is visible, and shows the face of nature in its most agreeable colours; but night, as it covers all the visible world with one dark and undistinguishing veil, is less pleasing to all the animal part of the creation. Therefore, as hell and the place of punishment is called utter darkness in scripture, so heaven is represented as a mansion of glory, as the inheritance of the saints in light: and this light is constant, without interruption, and everlasting, or without end: "there shall be no night there."

Let it be observed, that in the language of the holy writers, light is often ascribed to intellectual beings, and is used as a metaphor to imply knowledge, and holiness, and joy. Knowledge is the beauty and excellency of the mind; holiness is the best regulation of the will; and joy is the harmony of our best affections in the possession of what we love: and in opposition to these, ignorance, iniquity, and sorrow, are represented by the metaphor of darkness. There shall be no night in heaven: it may be very well applied in the spiritual sense. Clear and unerring knowledge, unspotted holiness, and everlasting joy, shall be the portion of all the inhabitants of the upper world. There is no night there.

Now, in order to pursue the subject, let us take a brief survey of the several evils or inconveniences which attend the night, or the season of darkness here on earth, and show how far the heavenly world is removed, and free from all manner of inconveniences of this kind.

I. Though night be the season of sleep for the relief of nature, yet it is a certain sign of the weakness and weariness of nature, when it wants such refreshments, and such dark seasons of relief.

But there is no night in heaven. Say, O ye inhabitants of that vital world, are ye ever weary? Or are your holy labours of such a kind, as to expose you to fatigue, or to tire your spirits? The blessed above mount up towards God on eagles' wings; they run at the command of God and are not weary; they walk on the hills of paradise and never faint.

There are no such animal bodies in heaven, whose natural springs of action can be exhausted or weakened by the business of the day. O blessed state, where our faculties shall be so happily suited to our work, that we shall never feel ourselves weary or fatigued!

And, as there is no weariness, so there is no sleeping there. Sleep was not made for the heavenly state. Can the spirits of the just ever sleep under the full blaze of divine glory, under the incessant communications of divine love?

II. Another inconvenience of night, near akin to the former, is, that business is interrupted by it, partly for want of light to perform it, as well as for want of strength to pursue it.

This is constantly visible in the successions of labour and repose here on earth; and the darkness of the night is appointed to interrupt the course of labour and business of the day, that nature may be recruited.

But the business of heaven is never interrupted; there is everlasting light and everlasting strength. Say, ye blessed spirits on high, who join in the services which are performed for God and the Lamb there, do your devotions, your duties, and your joys, ever suffer such an entire

interruption of the rest and silence, as the season of darkness on earth necessarily creates amongst the inhabitants of the world?

The living creatures which are represented by John the apostle, in Rev. iv. whether they signify saints or angels, yet they were full of eyes that never slumber; they rest not day nor night: this is spoken in the language of mortals, to signify that they are never interrupted by any change of seasons: they are described as ever saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." And the same sort of expression is used concerning the saints in heaven. "They who came out of tribulation," Rev. vii. 14; *i. e.* they constantly serve or worship him in his holy temple in heaven.

Our pleasures here on earth are short-lived; if they are intense, nature cannot bear them long, any more than constant business and labour: and, if our labours and our pleasures should happily join and mingle here on earth, which is not always the case, yet night compels us to break off the pleasing labour, and we must rest from the most delightful business.

Happy is that region on high, where business and pleasure are for ever the same among all the inhabitants of it, and there is no pause nor entire cessation of the one nor the other!

In that blessed world there can be no idleness, no inactivity. Who can be idle under the immediate eye of God? Who can trifle in the presence of Christ?

III. As in our present world "the hours of night" are inactive if we sleep, so "they seem long and tedious when our eyes are wakeful, and sleep flies from us."

Perhaps we hear the clock strike one hour after another, with wearisome longings for the next succeeding hour: we wish the dark season at an end, and we long for the approach of morning; we grow impatient for the dawning of the day.

But in heaven, ye spirits that have dwelt longest there, can you remember one tiresome or tedious hour, through all the years of your residence in that country? Is there not eternal wakefulness among all the blessed? Can any of you ever indulge a slumber? Can you sleep in heaven? No, for that world is all vital and sprightly for ever.

IV. While we are here on earth, the darkness of the night often exposes us to the danger of losing our way, of wandering into confusion, or falling into mischief.

When the sunbeams have withdrawn their light, and midnight clouds overspread the heavens, we cannot see our path before us. How many travellers have been betrayed by the thick shadows of the night, into mistaken ways, into sudden destruction and death!

But there are no dangers of this kind in the heavenly world: all the regions of paradise are illuminated by the glory of God: the light of his countenance shines upon every step that we shall take, and brightens all our way. Our feet may stumble on the dark mountains here below, but there are no stumbling-blocks on the hills of paradise, nor can we go astray. The paths of that country are all pleasure, and ever-living daylight shines upon them.

V. In the night we are exposed here on earth to the violence and plunder of wicked men, whether we are abroad or at home.

There is scarcely any safety now-a-days to those who travel in the night, and even in our own habitations there is frequent fear and surprise. At that season, the sons of mischief dig through houses in the dark, which they have marked for themselves in the day-time : they lurk in corners to seize the innocent, and to rob him of his possessions.

But in the heavenly world there is no dark hour ; there is nothing that can encourage such mischievous designs ; nor are any of the sons of violence, or the malicious powers of darkness, suffered to have an abode or refuge in that country. No surprise nor fears belong to the inhabitants of those regions.

While we dwell here below, amongst changing seasons of light and darkness, what daily care is taken to shut the doors of our dwellings against the men of mischief ! What solicitude in a time of war ! “ Every man with his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night.”

But in that blessed world there is no need of such defences ; no such guardian cares to secure the inhabitants. The gates of that city shall not be shut by day, and there is no night there. There shines perpetual daylight, and the gates are ever open. Blessed are the inhabitants of that country.

VI. The time of night and darkness is the time of the concealment of secret sins.

Shameful iniquities are then practised amongst men, because the darkness is a cover to them. “ The eye of the adulterer watches for the twilight.” Job xxiv. 15. In the black and dark night he hopes for concealment as well as the thief and the murderer ; and “ they that are drunken are drunken in the night.” 1 Thess. v. 7. The hours of darkness are a temptation to these iniquities, and the shadows of the evening are a veil to cover them.

But in the heavenly world there is no temptation to such iniquities, no defilement can gain an entrance there, nor could it find any veil or covering. The regions of light, and peace, and holy love, are never violated with such scenes of villainy and guilt. The light of God shines round every creature in that country, and there is not a saint nor angel that desires a covering from the sight of God.

VII. When the night returns upon us here on earth, the pleasures of sight vanish and are lost.

Knowledge is shut out at one entrance in a great degree, and one of our senses is withheld from the spreading beauties and glories of this lower creation.

It is true, the God of nature has appointed the moon and stars to relieve the darkness at some seasons, that when the sun is withdrawn, half the world at those hours may not be in confusion ; and by the inventions of men, we are furnished with lamps and candles to relieve our darkness within doors ; but if we stir abroad in the black and dark night, instead of the various and delightful scenes of the creation of God in the skies and the fields, we are presented with an universal blank of nature.

But in heaven, the glories of that world are for ever in view : the beauteous scenes and prospects in the hills of paradise are never hidden : we shall there continually behold a rich variety of things which eye hath

not seen. Every corner of that country is enlightened by God himself, and the Son of God with all his beams of grace shines for ever upon it.

VIII. It is another displeasing circumstance of the night season, that it is the coldest part of time.

When the sun is sunk below the earth, and its beams are hidden from us, its kindly and vital heat, as well as its light, are removed from one side of the globe.

And I might add, also, it is too often night with us in a spiritual sense, while we dwell here on earth; our hearts are cold as well as dark: and how much doth the devotion of our souls want its proper ardour and vivacity!

But when the soul is arrived at heaven, we shall be all warm and fervent in our divine and delightful work. We shall be made like "his angels who are most active spirits, and his ministers who are flames of fire." Ps. civ. 4. Heb. i. 7. Nor shall any dulness or indifferency hang upon our sanctified powers and passions; they shall be all warm and vigorous in their exercise.

Lastly. As night is the season appointed for sleep, so it becomes a constant, periodical emblem of death, as it returns every evening.

Sleep and midnight, as I have shown before, are no seasons of labour nor activity, nor of delight in the visible things of this world. Night and the slumbers of it, are a sort of shorter death and burial.

But in heaven, as there is no sleeping, there is no dying, nor is there any thing there that looks like death. Sleep, the image or emblem of death, is for ever banished from that world. All is vital activity there; every power is immortal, and every thing that dwells there is for ever alive. The saints shall never have reason to mourn over their withering graces and dying comforts; nor shall they ever complain of drowsy faculties. Shall I invite your thoughts to dwell a little upon this subject?

Shall we make a more particular inquiry, whence it comes to pass that there is no night nor darkness in the heavenly city? We are told, a little before the words of the text, that "the glory of God enlightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." There is no need of the sun by day, nor of the moon by night." The inheritance of the saints in light is sufficiently irradiated by God himself, and the beams of divine light, grace, and glory, are communicated from him, the original foundation of it, by the Lamb, to all the inhabitants of the heavenly country. They behold the glory of Christ, and converse with Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and are for ever present with the Lord. Heb. xii. 23, 24. 2 Cor. v. 8.

The sun, in the natural world, is a bright emblem of Divinity, or the Godhead, for it is the spring of all light, and heat, and life, to the creation. Now, if we should suppose this vast globe of fire which we call the sun, to be enclosed in a huge hollow sphere of crystal, which should attemper its rays like a transparent veil, and give milder and gentler influences to the burning beams of it, and yet transmit every desirable and useful portion of light or heat, this would be a happy emblem of the man Christ Jesus, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. It is the Lamb of God who, in a mild and gracious manner,

conveys the blessings originally derived from God his Father to all the saints.

When the bodies of the saints shall be raised again and re-united to their proper spirits, when they shall ascend to the place of their final heaven and supreme happiness, we know not what manner of bodies they shall be, what sort of senses they shall be furnished with, nor how many powers of conversing with the corporeal world shall be bestowed upon them. But this we may be assured of, that whatever inlets of knowledge, whatever avenues of pleasure, whatever delightful sensations are necessary to make the inhabitants of that world happy, they shall all be united in that spiritual body which God will prepare for the new-raised saints.

Or what if the whole body shall be endued all over with the senses of seeing and hearing? What if these sort of sensations shall be diffused throughout all that immortal body, as feeling is diffused through all our present mortal flesh? What if God himself shall, in a more illustrious manner irradiate all the powers of the body and spirit, and communicate the light of knowledge, holiness, and joy, in a superior manner to what we can now conceive and imagine? This is certain, that darkness in every sense, with all the inconveniences and unhappy consequences of it, is and must be for ever banished from the heavenly state. There is no night there.

Remarks.

I come in the last place to make a few remarks upon the foregoing discourse, and in order to render them more effectual for our spiritual advantage, I shall consider the words of my text, "There shall be no night there," in their metaphorical or spiritual meaning, as well as in their literal sense. There is no night of ignorance or error in the mind, no night of guilt nor of sorrow in the soul; but the blessed above shall dwell surrounded with the light of Divine knowledge, &c.

1. When heaven, earth, and hell are compared together, with relation to light and darkness, or night and day, we then see them in their proper distinctions and aspects. Every thing is set in its most distinguishing situation and appearance, when it is compared with things which are most opposite.

The earth on which we dwell during this state of trial, has neither all day nor all night belonging to it; but sometimes light appears, and again darkness.

Though there be long seasons of darkness in the winter, &c. yet the God of nature has given us a larger portion of light than there is of darkness, throughout the whole globe of the earth: and this benefit we receive by the remaining beams of the sun after its setting, and by the assistance of the moon and the stars of heaven. Blessed be God for the moon and stars, as well as for the sunbeams and the brightness of noon! Blessed be God for all the lights of nature! but we still bless him more for the light of the gospel, and for any rays from heaven, any beams of the Sun of Righteousness, which diffuse knowledge and holiness among the inhabitants of this world. God is here manifesting his love and grace in such proportions as he thinks proper; sufficient to guide us on in our way to that heavenly country.

In hell there is all night and darkness, thick darkness in every sense, for the God of glory is absent there, as to any manifestations of his face and favour. And, therefore, it is often called utter darkness, where there is weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. There is no holiness, there is no comfort, there are no benefits of the creation, no blessings of grace; all are forfeited and gone for ever.

2. What light of every kind we are made partakers of here on earth, let us use it with holy thankfulness, with zeal and religious improvement! Hereby we may be assisted and animated to travel on, through the mingled stages and scenes of light and darkness, in this world, till we arrive at the inheritance of the saints in perfect light. Let us not be found amongst the number of those who when light came into the world, loved darkness rather than light, lest we fall under their condemnation. John iii. 19. Let us never rest till "the day-spring that has visited us from on high," &c.

Oh, what a blessed change does the converting grace of Christ make in the soul! It is like the beauty and pleasure which the rising morning diffuses over the face of the earth, after a night of storm and darkness: it is so much of heaven let into all the chambers of the soul: it is a light that carries divine heat and life with it; it renews all the powers of the spirit.

3. If God has wrought this sacred and divine change in our souls, if we are made the children of light, let us put away all the works of darkness with hatred and detestation. Let us walk in the light of truth and holiness. "Ye were once darkness. Ye are all the children of the light, and of the day," &c. Eph. v. 8. 1 Thess. v. 5.

To animate every Christian to this holy care and watchfulness, let us think what a terrible disappointment it will be, after we have made a bright profession of Christianity in our lives, to lie down in death in a state of sin and guilt, and to awake in everlasting darkness! It is only those who walk in the light of holiness here, who can be fit to dwell in the presence of God. "Light is sown only for the righteous," &c. and it shall break out one day from amongst the clouds, a glorious day.

4. Under our darkest nights, our most inactive and heavy hours, our most uncomfortable seasons here on earth, let us remember we are travelling to a world of light and joy. If we happen to lie awake in midnight darkness, and count the tedious hours one after another, let us comfort ourselves that we are not shut up in eternal night and darkness without hope. What if we sit in darkness and mourning, and see no light, and the beams of divine consolation are cut off, let us still trust in the name of the Lord, and stay ourselves upon our God, Isa. l. 10, especially as he manifests himself in the Lamb that was slain, the blessed medium of his mercy! Let us learn to say with the prophet, "When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me; he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness!" Micah vii. 8, 9.

NO PAIN AMONG THE BLESSED.

Neither shall there be any more pain.—Rev. xxi. 4.

THERE have been some divines in ancient times, as well as in our present age, who suppose this prophecy relates to some glorious and happy event here on earth, wherein the saints and faithful followers of Christ shall be delivered from the bondage and miseries to which they have been exposed in all former ages, and shall enjoy the blessings which these words promise. Among these, some have placed this happy state before the resurrection of the body; others make it to belong to that first resurrection which is spoken of in Rev. xx. 6. But let this prophecy have a particular aspect upon what earthly period soever, yet all must grant it is certainly true concerning the heavenly state; and in this sense, as part of our happiness in heaven, I shall understand the words here, and propose them as the foundation for my present discourse.

Among the many things that make this life uncomfortable, and render mankind unhappy here below, this is one that has a large influence, viz. that in this mortal state we are all liable to pain, from which we shall be perfectly delivered in the life to come.

I need not spend time in explaining what pain is to persons who dwell in flesh and blood: yet, that I may proceed regularly, I would just give you this short description of it. Pain is an uneasy perception of the soul, occasioned by some indisposition of the body to which it is united.

In order to make our present meditations on this part of the blessedness of heaven useful and joyful to us while we are here on earth, let us inquire,

I. What are the evils which flow from pain, and usually attend it in this life? and all along as we go we shall take a short view of the heavenly state, where we shall be released from all these evils and inconveniencies.

1. Pain has a natural tendency to make the mind sorrowful as well as the body uneasy. Our souls are so nearly united to flesh and blood, that it is not possible for the mind to possess perfect happiness, and ease, while the body is exposed to so many occasions of pain. Natural courage and strength of heart may prevail in some persons to bear up their spirits under long and intense pains of flesh, yet they really take away so much of the ease and pleasure of life, while any of us lie under the acute sensations of them. Pain will make us confess that we are flesh and blood, and force us sometimes to cry out and groan.

But in heaven, where there is no pain, there shall be no sighing nor groaning, nor any more crying. There shall be nothing to make the flesh or the spirit uneasy, and to break the eternal thread of peace and pleasure that runs through the whole duration of the saints: not one painful moment to interrupt the everlasting felicity of that state. When we have done with earth and mortality, we have done also with sickness and anguish of nature, and with all sorrow and vexation for ever. There are no groans in the heavenly world to break in upon the harmony

of the harps and the songs of the blessed ; no sighs, no outcries, no anguish there to disturb the music and the joy of the inhabitants.

2. Another evil which attends on pain is this, that it so indisposes our nature as often to unfit us for the business and duties of the present state. With how much coldness and indifference do we go about our daily work, and perform it too with many interruptions, when nature is burdened with continual pain, and the vital springs of action are overborne with perpetual uneasiness ! What a listlessness do we find to many of the duties of religion at such a season, unless it be to run more frequently to the throne of God, and pour out our groanings and our complaints there ! Groanings and cries are the language of nature, and the children of God address themselves in this language to their heavenly Father.

And what an indisposition and backwardness do we feel in ourselves to fulfil many of the duties towards our fellow-creatures, while we ourselves are under present smart and anguish ! Pain will so sensibly affect self, as to draw off all our thoughts thither, and centre them there that we cannot so much employ our cares and our active powers for the benefit of our neighbours : it abates our concern for our friends.

But what a blessed state will that be when we shall never feel this indisposition to duties, either human or divine, through any uneasiness of the body ! When we shall never more be subject to any of these painful impediments, but for ever cast off all those clogs and burdens which fetter the active powers of the soul. Then we shall be joyfully employed in such unknown and glorious services to God our Father, and to the blessed Jesus, as require much superior capacities to what we here possess, and shall find no weakness, no weariness, no pain, throughout all the years of our immortality. None of the blessed above are at rest or idle, either day or night, but “they serve him in his temple.” Rev. vii. 15 ; iv. 8. No faintness, no languors are known there. “The inhabitants of that land shall not say, I am sick.” Everlasting vigour, cheerfulness, and ease, shall render every blessed soul for ever zealous and active in obedience, as the angels are in heaven.

3. Pain unfits us for the enjoyment of life, as well as for the labours and duties of it. It takes away all the pleasing satisfactions which might attend our circumstances, and renders the objects of them insipid and unrelishing. What pleasure can a rich man take in all the affluence of earthly blessings around him, while some painful distemper holds him upon the rack, and distresses him with the torture ? How little delight can he find in meats or in drinks which are prepared for luxury, when sharp pain calls all his attention to the diseased part ! What joy can he find in magnificent buildings, in gay and shining furniture, in elegant gardens, or in all the glittering treasures of the Indies, when the gout torments his hands and his feet, or the rheumatism afflicts his limbs with intense anguish ? If pain attack any part of the body, and rise to a high degree, the luxuries of life grow tasteless, and life itself is imbittered to us.

But O, what a wondrous, what a joyful change shall that be, when the soul is commanded to forsake this flesh and blood ! when it rises as on the wings of angels to the heavenly world, and leaves every pain behind

it, together with the body, in the arms of death! And what a more illustrious and delightful change shall we meet in the great rising day, when our bodies shall start up out of the dust with vigorous immortality, and without any spring or seat of pain!

4. Another inconvenience and evil which belongs to pain is, that it makes time and life itself appear tedious and tiresome, and adds a new burden to all other grievances. Many evidences of this truth are scattered throughout all nature, and on all sides of this globe. There is not one age of mankind but can furnish us with millions of instances. In what melancholy language does Job discover his sensations of the tiresome nature of pain! "I am made to possess months of vanity." Job viii. 3. When pain takes hold of our flesh, it seems to stretch the measures of time to a tedious length: we cry out as Moses expresses it, "In the morning we say, Would to God it were evening!" Deut. xxviii. 67.

Long are those hours, indeed, whether of day-light or darkness, wherein there is no relief nor intermission of acute pain. How tiresome a thing is it to count the clock at midnight in long successions, and to wait every hour for the distant approach of morning!

But when we turn our thoughts to the heavenly world, where there is no pain, there we shall find no weary hours, no tedious days, though eternity with all its unmeasurable lengths of duration lie before us. What a dismal thought is eternal pain? The very mention of it makes nature shudder and stand aghast; but futurity, with all its endless years, in a land of peace and pleasure, gives the soul the most delightful prospect.

5. Another evil that belongs to pain is, that it has an unhappy tendency to ruffle the passions, and to render us fretful and peevish within ourselves, as well as towards those who are round about us. Not that we are to suppose that this peevish humour, this fretfulness of spirit, are thereby made innocent and perfectly excused: no, by no means: but it must be acknowledged still, that continuance in pain is too ready to work up the spirit into frequent disquietude and uneasiness. We are tempted to fret at every thing, we quarrel with every thing, we grow impatient under every delay. Even the kindest and the tenderest hand that ministers to our relief, can hardly secure itself from the peevish quarrels of a man in extreme pain.

This is so common a fault, that I fear it is too much excused and indulged. Let me rather say with myself, "My God is now putting to the trial what sort of a Christian I am, and how much I have learned of self-government, and through his grace I will subdue my uneasy passions, though I cannot relieve my pain," &c.

A holy soul through the severity of pain, may sometimes, in such an hour, be too much ruffled by sudden and violent fits of impatience. Job iii. and vii. 15.

But these trials are for ever finished when this life expires: then all our pains are ended for ever, if we are found among the children of God. There is not, nor can be any temptation in heaven, nor fretfulness nor disquietude of mind. There is nothing but peace and pleasure, joy and love, goodness and benevolence, ease and satisfaction, diffused through

all the regions on high. O happy state and blessed mansions of the saints !

6. Pain carries a temptation with it, sometimes to repine and murmur at the providence of God. Not fellow-creatures alone, but even our sovereign Creator comes within the reach of the peevish humours, which are alarmed and roused by sharp or continual pain. Jonah told God himself, in a passion, that "he did well to be angry, even unto death." Jonah iv. 9. And even the man of Uz, the pattern of patience, was sometimes transported with the smart and maladies that were upon him, so that he complained against God as well as complained to him, and used some very unbecoming expressions towards his Maker. When we are under the smarting rebukes of Providence, we are ready to compare ourselves with others who are in peace: "Why am I thus afflicted more than others? Why hast thou set me as a mark for thine arrows? Why dost thou not let loose thy hand, and cut me off from the earth?" Job vi. 9.

But in heaven there is a glorious reverse of all such unhappy scenes; there is no pain, nor any temptation to murmur at the dealings of the Almighty: there is nothing that can incline us to think hardly of God: the days of chastisement are for ever ended, and painful discipline shall be used no more. We shall live for ever in the embraces of the love of God, and he shall be the object of our everlasting praise.

7. To add no more, pain and anguish of the flesh have sometimes prevailed so far as to distract the mind as well as destroy the body. It has overpowered all the reasoning faculties of man; it has destroyed natural life, and brought it down to the grave. The senses have been confounded, and the understanding overwhelmed with severe and rack-ing pain. Extreme smart of the flesh distresses feeble nature, and turns the whole frame of it upside down in wild confusion. It has actually worn out this animal frame, and stopped all the springs of vital motion.

But when we survey the mansions of the heavenly world, we shall find none of these evils there; no danger of any such events as these: for there is no pain, no sorrow, no crying, no death nor destruction there. There the sickly Christian is delivered from all the maladies of the flesh, and the twinges of acute pain. There the martyrs of the religion of Jesus, and all the holy confessors, are free from their cruel tormentors, those surly executioners of heathen fury, or anti-Christian wrath. They are for ever released from racks, and wheels, and fires, and every engine of torture and smart. Immortal ease and unfading health and cheerfulness run through their eternal state, and all the powers of the man are composed for the most regular exercises of devotion and divine joy.

II. What just and convincing arguments or proofs can be given, that there are no pains nor uneasy sensations to be felt by the saints in a future state, nor to be feared after this life?

1. God has assured us so in his word, that there is no pain for holy souls to endure in the world to come. My text may be esteemed a sufficient proof of it; for whatsoever particular event or period of the church on earth this prophecy may refer to, yet the description is borrowed from the blessedness of heaven; and if there shall be any such state on earth, much more will it be so in the heavenly world. We are expressly told, in

order to encourage the persecuted saints and martyrs, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," &c. Rev. xiv. 13.

2. God has not provided any medium to convey pain to holy souls after they have dropped this body of flesh. They are pardoned, they are sanctified, they are accepted of God for ever: and since they are in no danger of sinning afresh by the influences of corrupt flesh and blood, therefore they are in no fear of suffering any thing thereby.

Nor will the body at the final resurrection of the saints be made for a medium of any painful sensations. All the pains of nature are ended, when the first union between flesh and spirit is dissolved. When this body lies down to sleep in the dust, it shall never awake again with any of the principles of pain. "Though it be sown in weakness, it is raised in power," &c. 1 Cor. xv. 43.

3. There are no moral causes nor reasons why there should be any thing of pain provided for the heavenly state. And if there be no moral reasons for it, surely God will not provide pains for his creatures without reason!

III. What are the chief moral reasons or designs of the blessed God in sending pain on his creatures here below, and at the same time show, that these designs and purposes of God are finished.

1. Pain is sometimes sent into our natures to awaken slothful and drowsy Christians out of their spiritual slumbers, or to rouse stupid sinners from a state of spiritual death. Intense and sharp pain of the flesh has oftentimes been the appointed and effectual means of Providence to attain these desirable ends.

Pain is like a rod in the hand of God, wherewith he smites sinners that are dead in their trespasses, and his spirit joins with it to awaken them into spiritual life. This rod is sometimes so smarting and severe, that it will make a senseless and ungodly wretch look upwards to the hand that smites it, and take notice of the rebuke of Heaven.

Acute pain is also a common instrument in our heavenly Father's hand, to recover backsliding souls from their secure and drowsy state. David often found it so, and speaks it plainly in the 38th and 39th Psalms; and in Ps. cxix. 67.

But there is no need of this discipline in heaven. And where the designs of such smarting strokes have no place, pain itself must be for ever banished; for "God does not willingly afflict, nor take delight in grieving the children of men."

2. To punish men for their faults and follies, and to guard them against new temptations. "Thy own wickedness shall correct thee," Jer. ii. 19, *i. e.* by means of the smarting chastisements they bring upon men.

But in the heavenly state, there are no faults to punish, no follies to chastise. Jesus, our Surety, in the days of his flesh, has suffered those sorrows which made atonement for sin: and that anguish of his holy soul, and the blood of his cross, have satisfied the demands of God, so that with honour he can pardon ten thousand penitent criminals, and provide an inheritance of ease and blessedness for them for ever. Upon our release from this flesh and blood, neither the guilt nor the power of sin shall attend the saints in their flight to heaven.

To exercise and try the virtues and the graces of his people. As gold is thrown into the fire to prove and try how pure it is, so the children of God are sometimes left for a season in a furnace of sufferings, partly to refine them from their dross, and partly to discover their purity and their substantial weight and worth.

Sometimes God lays smarting pain with his own hand on the flesh of his people, on purpose to try their graces. When we endure the pain without murmuring at Providence, then it is we come off conquerors. Christian submission and silence under the hand of God, is one way to victory. "I was dumb," says David. Ps: xxxix. 2. Our love to God, our resignation to his will, our holy fortitude and our patience, find a proper trial in such smarting seasons. "Tribulation worketh patience," Rom. v. 4, and patience under tribulation gives us experience of the dealings of God with his people, and makes our way to a confirmed hope in his love. The evidence of our various graces grows brighter and stronger under a smarting rod, till we are settled in a joyful confidence.

Sometimes he has permitted evil angels to put the flesh to pain, for the trial of his children; so Job was smitten with sore boils from head to foot by the malice of Satan, at the permission of God; but "he knows the way that I take." Job xxiii. 10—12.

At other times he suffers wicked men to spend their own malice, and to inflict dreadful pains upon his own children. Look back to the years of ancient persecution in the land of Israel, under Jewish or heathen tyrants; review the annals of Great Britain; look over the seas into popish kingdoms; take a view of the cursed courts of inquisition in Spain, Portugal, and Italy; behold the weapons, the scourges, the racks, the machines of torture, and the engines of cruelty, devised by the barbarous and inhuman wit of men, to constrain the saints to renounce their faith, and dishonour their Saviour. See the slow fires where the martyrs have been roasted to death with lingering torment. These are the seasons of terrible trial indeed, whereby the malice of Satan and antichrist would force the servants of God, and the followers of the Lamb, into sinful compliances with their idolatry, or a desertion of their post of duty: but the Spirit of God has supported his children to bear a glorious testimony to pure and undefiled religion; and they have seemed to mock the rage of their tormentors.

But blessed be God, that this world is the only stage of such trials. As soon as the state of probation is finished, the state of recompense begins. Such hard and painful exercises to try the virtues of the saints, have no place in the world which was not made for a stage of trial and conflict, but a place of glorious reward. Heaven is a place where crowns and prizes are distributed to all those blessed ones who have endured temptation.

Pain is sent us by the hand of Providence, to teach us many a lesson both of truth and duty, which perhaps we should never have learned so well without it. This sharp sensation awakens our best powers to attend to those truths and duties which we took less notice of before: in the time of perfect ease we are ready to let them lie neglected or forgotten, till God our great Master takes his rod in hand for our correction.

IV. Inquire what are those spiritual lessons of instruction which may be learned on earth from the pains we have suffered, or may suffer in the flesh.

1. Pain teaches us feelingly, what feeble creatures we are, and how entirely dependent on God for every moment of ease. We are naturally wild and wanton creatures; and especially in the season of youth, our gayer powers are gadding abroad at the call of every temptation; but when God sends his arrows into our flesh, he arrests us on a sudden, and teaches us that we are but men, poor feeble dying creatures. We are ready to exult in the vigour of youth: we are so vain and foolish, as to imagine nothing can hurt us; but when the pain of a little nerve seizes us, and we feel the acute twinges of it, we are made to confess, that our flesh is not iron, nor our bones brass; that we are by no means the lords of ourselves, nor sovereigns over our own nature. We cannot remove the least degree of pain, till the Lord who sent it, takes off his hand, and commands the smart to cease. Ps. xxxix. 10. When David felt the stroke of the hand of God upon him, he made an humble address to God, and acknowledged that his "beauty consumed away like a moth." Ps. xxxix. 10, 11.

2. The great evil that is contained in the nature of sin, because it is the occasion of such intense pain and misery to human nature. I grant I have hinted this before, but I would have it more powerfully impressed upon our spirits, and therefore I introduce it here again in this part of my discourse as a spiritual lesson, which we learn under the discipline of our Heavenly Father.

If sin had never been known in our world, all the pain that arises from inward diseases of nature, or from outward violence, had been a stranger to the human race—an unknown evil among the sons of men.

In general, we have sufficient reason to say, that as sin brought death into human nature, so it was sin that brought in pain also; and where-soever there is any pain suffered among the sons and daughters of men, we may venture to assert boldly, that the sufferer may learn the evil of sin.

And sometimes the providence of God is pleased to point out to us the particular sin we are guilty of, by the special punishment which he inflicts. In Ps. cvii. 17, 18, "fools are said to be afflicted," *i. e.* with pain and sickness, "because of their transgressions."

O, blessed smart! O, happy pain! that helps to soften the heart of a sinner, and melts it to receive divine instruction. "Blessed is the man whom thou correctest." Ps. xciv. 12.

3. How dreadfully the great God can punish sin and sinners when he pleases, in this world or in others! It is written in the Song of Moses, the man of God, "according to thy fear, so is thy wrath." Ps. xc. 11, *i. e.* the displeasure and anger of the blessed God is as terrible as we can fear it to be: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Heb. x. 31.

Let us think again, that when the hand of our Creator sends pain into our flesh, we cannot avoid it, we cannot fly from it, we carry it, where-soever we go: his arrows stick fast in us, and we cannot shake them off. "If I make my bed in the grave, Lord, thou art there;" thy hand of justice and punishment would find me out.

What a formidable thing it is to such creatures as we are, to have God our Maker for our enemy! That God, who has all the tribes of pain and disease, and the innumerable hosts of maladies at his command. Let the sinner tremble at the name of his power and terror, who can fill both flesh and spirit with thrilling agonies: and yet he never punishes beyond what our iniquities deserve.

4. When we feel acute pains, we may learn something of the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ, even the Son of God, that glorious Being, who took upon him flesh and blood for our sakes, that he might be capable of pain and death, though he had never sinned. He endured intense anguish to make atonement for our crimes.

Happy was he in his Father's bosom, and the delight of his soul, through many long ages before his incarnation: but he condescended to be born in the likeness of sinful flesh, to deliver us from the wrath of God in hell, to save our flesh and spirit from eternal anguish.

5. The value and worth of the word of God, and the sweetness of a promise, which can give the kindest relief to a painful hour, and soothe the anguish of nature. They teach us the excellency of the covenant of grace, which has sometimes strengthened the feeblest pieces of human nature to bear intense sufferings in the body, and which sanctifies them all to our advantage.

We read of philosophers and heroes in some ancient histories, who could endure pain by dint of reasoning, by a pride of their science, by an obstinacy of heart, or by natural courage; but a Christian takes the word of a promise, and lies down upon it in the midst of intense pains of nature; and the pleasure of devotion supplies him with such ease, that all the reasonings of philosophy, all the courage of nature, all the anodynes of medicines, and soothing plasters, have attempted without success. When a child of God can read his Father's love in a promise, and by searching into the qualifications of his own soul, can lay faster hold of it by a living faith, the rage of his pain is much allayed, and made half easy. A promise is a sweet couch to rest a languishing body in the midst of pains, and a soft repose for the head or heart-ache.

"It is my heavenly Father that scourges me, and I know he designs me no hurt, though he fill my flesh with present pain: his own presence, and the sense of his love, soften the anguish of all that I feel: he bids me not yield to fear, for when I pass through the fire he will be with me." Isa. xliii. 2.

6. The excellency and use of the mercy-seat in heaven, and the admirable privilege of prayer. Even the sons of mere nature are ready to think of God at such a season: and they who never prayed before, "pour out a prayer before him when his chastening is upon them." Isa. xxvi. 16. But much more delightful is it for a child of God, that has been used to address the throne of grace, to run thither with pleasure and hope, and to spread all his anguish before the face of his heavenly Father.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he dwelt in flesh and blood, practised this part of religion with holy satisfaction and success: "Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and an angel was sent to strengthen and comfort him." Luke xxii. 43, 44. This was the relief of David

in ancient times. "Look upon my affliction." Ps. xxv. 18. "The sorrows of death compassed me." Ps. cxvi. 3, 4. And when he found a gracious answer to his request, he acknowledges the grace of God therein, and charges his soul to dwell near God: "Return to thy rest, O my soul," &c. Ps. cxvi. 7.

But we have stronger encouragement than David was acquainted with, since it is revealed to us, that we have an High Priest at this throne, ready to bespeak all necessary relief for us there. "An High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," Heb. iv. 15, who has sustained the same sorrows and pains in the flesh, who can pity and relieve his people under their maladies and acutest anguish. Heb. ii. 18.

But there is no need of this sort of discipline in the blessed regions of heaven, to teach the inhabitants such truths.

They will remember what feeble, helpless creatures they were when they dwelt in flesh and blood; but they have put off those fleshly garments and mortality, with all its weakness together. The spirits of the blessed know nothing of those frailties, nor shall the body of the saints, new-raised from the dust, bring back any of their old infirmities with them.

They have no need of pain, in those fields or gardens of pleasure, to teach them the evil of sin; they well remember all the sorrows they have passed through in their mortal state, while they were traversing the wilderness of this world, and they know that sin was the cause of them all. They see the evil of sin in the glass of divine holiness, and the hateful contrariety that is in it to the nature of God, is discovered in the immediate light of all his perfections. They behold the evil of sin in the marks of the sufferings of the blessed Saviour; he appears in glory, "as the Lamb that was slain." Rev. v. 12.

Nor have the blessed above any need to learn how dreadfully God can punish sin and sinners, while they behold his indignation going forth to make the wicked enemies of God in hell for ever justly miserable.

Nor do these happy beings stand in need of new sensations of pain to teach the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ, who exposed himself to intense and smarting anguish, both of flesh and spirit, to procure their salvation: nor while they dwell amidst the blessedness of that state which the Redeemer purchased with the price of his own sufferings.

Nor do they want to learn in heaven the value of the word of God and his promises, by which they were supported under their pains and sorrows in this mortal state. Those promises have been fulfilled to them partly on earth, and in a more glorious and abundant manner in the heavenly world.

And if any of them were too cold and remiss, and infrequent in their applications to the mercy-seat by prayer; yet they can never forget the value of this privilege, while they themselves dwell round about the throne, and behold all their ancient sincere addresses to the mercy-seat answered and swallowed up in the full fruition. They are at home in their Father's house, and for ever near him in his all-sufficiency. It is from thence they are constantly deriving immortal supplies of blessedness, as from a spring that will never fail.

V. What are the practical lessons which pain may teach us while we are here on earth, and afterward make it evident, that there is no need of pain in heaven for the same purposes?

1. The frequent returns of pain may put us in mind to offer to God his due sacrifices of praise for the years of ease which we have enjoyed. We are too ready to forget the mercy of God herein, unless we are awakened by new painful sensations; and when we experience new relief, then our lips are opened with thankfulness.

What poor, sorry, sinful creatures are we in the present state, who want to be taught the value of our mercies by the removal of them!

2. To sympathise with those who suffer. We learn a tenderness of soul experimentally by our own sufferings. When our nature is pinched and pierced through with some smarting malady, we learn to pity those who lie groaning under the same disease.

Our blessed Saviour himself, though he wanted not compassion and love to the children of men, is represented to us as our merciful High Priest, who had learned sympathy in the same way of experience as we learn it. "In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted." Heb. ii. 18; iv. 15; and v. 2—8.

3. Since our natures are subject to pain; it should teach us watchfulness against every sin, lest we double our own distresses by the mixture in guilt with them. How careful should we be to keep always a clear conscience, that we may be able at all times to look up with pleasure to the hand of God who smites us!

4. Pain in the flesh may sometimes be sent to teach us to wean ourselves by degrees from this body, which we love too well, this body, which has all the springs of pain in it. How little should we be fond of this flesh and blood in the present feeble state, wherein we are continually liable to one malady or another!

A long continuance of pain, or the frequent repeated twingings of it, will teach a Christian, and incline him to meet death with courage at the appointed hour of release.

5. We are taught to breathe after the blessedness of the heavenly state, wherein there shall be no pain. When the soul is dismissed from the bonds of flesh, and presented before God in the world of spirits, without spot or blemish, by Jesus our great forerunner, "who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body," Phil. iii. 21, "We shall hunger no more, we shall thirst no more, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. Rev. vii. 16, 17.

OF THE FINAL STATE OF THE WICKED IN HELL.

The wicked shall be turned into hell.—Ps. ix. 17.

WHEN the judgment is finished, and the sentence pronounced, the wicked will go into "everlasting punishment." Matt. xxv. 46. What

that punishment will be, and the duration of it, are the things to be considered.

I. Prove that there will be a state of punishment of wicked men in the future world.

There is a punishment of the wicked in their souls, which takes place at death, as appears from the parable of the rich man. Luke xvi. 23. And there is a punishment of them in soul and body, after the resurrection and the last judgment. See Rev. xx. 12—15; as will appear,

1. From the light of nature among the heathens; being owned and spoken of, not only by their poets, but by their philosophers, and those the more serious among them.

2. A state of punishment hereafter, appears from the impressions of guilt and wrath on the consciences of men, as Cain, Pharaoh, Judas, &c.

3. This may be argued from the justice of God. If there be a God, he must be believed to be just; and if there be a just God, there must be a future state of punishment.

4. This is abundantly evident from divine revelation; from the books both of the Old and New Testament. David says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell." And our Lord speaks of some sins which make men in danger of hell-fire. Matt. v. 22—30; x. 28.

5. This may be farther confirmed, from the examples of persons that already endure this punishment, at least in part; as the fallen angels. 2 Pet. ii. 4. Rev. xx. 10. Another instance is, the men of the old world, who, by their sins, brought a flood upon it; and not only their bodies were destroyed by the flood, but their spirits, or souls. 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20.

II. The names and phrases by which the place and state of future punishment are expressed.

1. The names of this place. I call it a place, and not a state only; though some speak of it only as such. But the scriptures make mention of it as a "place of torment," Luke xvi. 28, and Judas is said to "go to his own place." Acts i. 25.

(1.) It is called destruction, or Abaddon, which is the name of the king of the bottomless pit, Rev. ix. 11, which signifies a destroyer; and is rendered destruction in Job xxvi. 6; Prov. xv. 11, and xxvii. 20.

(2.) Sheol, which is often rendered the grave; as in Gen. xlii. 38, and xliv. 31, and should be where it is sometimes translated hell, as in Ps. xvi. 10; yet in some places it seems as if it could not be understood of that, but of the state or place of punishment of the wicked, as in Ps. ix. 17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell." Enveloped with all darkness, and consumed in a fire not blown. Job. xx. 26, 29. Ps. xi. 6.

(3.) Tophet, which was a place in the valley of the son of Hinnom, where the Israelites burnt their sons and their daughters in the fire, sacrificing them to Molech; see Jer. vii. 31, 32; and this seems to be used of the place and state of the punishment of the wicked: "Tophet is ordained of old," &c. Isa. xxx. 33.

(4.) From Gehinnom, the valley of Hinnom, where Tophet was, is the word used in the New Testament, Matt. v. 22, 29, 30. Mark ix. 43, 45, 47, for the fire of hell; there, as just observed, children were burnt

with fire, and sacrificed to Molech; which horrid customs the Israelites borrowed from their neighbours the Canaanites. The inhabitants had a statue of Saturn, the same with Molech, whose hands were put in such a position, that when children were put in them, they rolled down, and fell into a chasm, or ditch, full of fire; a fit emblem of the fire of hell, often called in scripture "a lake of fire." Rev. xxi. 8.

(5.) Sometimes this place is called the deep abyss, or bottomless pit. The devils, when they came out of the man in whom was a legion, besought Christ that he would not order them to go into the deep, which seems to be their place of full torment. Rev. ix. 1—11; and xx. 3.

(6.) Another name it has in the New Testament, is Hades, which signifies an invisible state, a state of darkness. When the rich man died, was buried, and his body laid in the earth, it is said, "in Hades, in hell, he lift up his eyes." Luke xvi. 23, 24.

(7.) Another word by which it is expressed, is, Tartarus; and this also but in one place, and comprehended in a verb there used: "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus," or hell. 2 Pet. ii. 4.

2. There are words and phrases by which the future punishment of the wicked is expressed, and which may serve to give a farther account of the nature of it.

(1.) It is represented as a prison. So the fallen angels are said to be cast into hell, as into a prison. 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20. 2 Pet. ii. 4. Wicked men are not only criminals, but debtors; and whereas they have not wherewith to pay their debts, and no surety to pay them for them, they go to prison. Matt. v. 26.

(2.) It is spoken of as a state of darkness, "of blackness of darkness," Jude, ver. 13; of the grossest, "of outer darkness." Matt. viii. 12. Those in it being shut out of the kingdom of light, the inheritance of the saints in light: and so like the darkness of the Egyptians.

(3.) It is set forth by fire, Matt. v. 22, than which nothing gives more pain, nor is more excruciating. By "a furnace of fire," Matt. xiii. 42—50, like that which Nebuchadnezzar caused to be heated; and by "a lake of fire, and of brimstone" also which enrages the fire, and increases the strength of it. Rev. xx. 10, 15; xxi. 8.

(4.) It is expressed by a "worm that never dies." Mark ix. 44. 48; see Isa. lxvi. 24.

(5.) This is what is called the second death, Rev xxi. 8, of which good men shall not be hurt, and on whom it shall have no power. Rev. ii. 11, and xx. 6.

(6.) A variety of phrases are used to signify the terribleness of the future punishment of the wicked; as by tearing them in pieces, by cutting them asunder, and by weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, through grief, malice, and envy.

(7.) By the wrath of God, which comes upon the children of disobedience; by wrath to come.

III. The species and sorts of that punishment.

1. There is the punishment of loss, which will consist of a privation of all good things.

(1.) Of God, the chiefest good.

(2.) Of Christ, the light and life of men.

(3.) Of grace, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Rom. xiv. 17.

(4.) Of the company of angels and saints.

(5.) Of the kingdom of heaven, from which they will be excluded.

2. There is the punishment of sense, and which will lie both in body and soul ; for both will be destroyed in hell.

(1.) The body. Hence we often read of the whole body, and of the several members of it with it, being cast into hell. Matt. v. 29, 30. Mark ix. 43, 45, 47.

(2.) The soul will be filled with a sense of wrath, which will be poured forth on the wicked, and burn like fire. Ps. lxxix. 5. Nahum i. 6.

IV. The degrees of this punishment.

Some have had the advantage of a written law ; the law of Moses, as the Jews. Some have had the advantage of a preached gospel, and have despised it. Matt. xi. 20—24. Some have been favoured with greater mercies in providence than others, and have abused them. Rom. ii. 4, 5. Luke xvi. 25.

Lastly, the duration of this punishment.

It will always continue, and never have an end ; and is, therefore, called everlasting punishment, and everlasting destruction. Matt. xxv. 46. 2 Thess. i. 9. From the sacred scriptures the eternity of future punishment appears abundantly evident.

1. From the sense and fears of sinners in Zion, expressed in Isa. xxxiii. 14 : “ The sinners in Zion are afraid ; who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings ? ”

2. From the resurrection of the dead, and the issue of it. Dan. xii.

2. “ Some of whom awake to everlasting life.” John v. 29.

3. From the sentence pronounced on the wicked. Matt. iii. 12 ; xxv. 41. Rev. xiv. 11.

4. From the execution of the sentence : “ These shall go away into everlasting punishment.” Matt. xxv. 46.

OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

And thou shalt know the Lord.—Hos. ii. 20.

THERE can be no cordial obedience to God by those who are ignorant of him ; the language of such persons will be like that of Pharaoh. Exod. v. 2. It is a false maxim of those who say, “ ignorance is the mother of devotion ; ” it is so far from being true, that it is the parent of superstition and idolatry. There can be no grace without knowledge, no faith without it ; the object must be known, or it cannot be rightly believed in. The blind man’s answer to Christ’s question is a wise one. John ix. 30, 31. The gentiles, who are described as such who know not God, are also said to be “ without hope, and without God in the world ; ” without hope in God and of good things from him now, and without hope of the resurrection of the dead, a future state, and enjoyment of happiness in it. 1 Thess. iv. 5, 13. An unknown object of

love, an unseen person, may—"whom having not seen we love"—but an unknown person cannot be truly and cordially loved: God must be known, or he cannot be loved. Where ignorance reigns no good thing dwells. Now,

I. Let it be observed, that persons in a natural and unregenerate state are destitute of divine knowledge; the time before conversion is a time of ignorance. Acts xvii. 30.

1. Sin hath deprived us of communion with God, corrupted our nature, and darkened our understandings. Eph. iv. 18. This is the state and case of all men before conversion; they are not only dark, but darkness itself, till they are made light in the Lord.

2. This ignorance is increased by a course of sinning. Man naturally is in darkness, and continues in it, and walketh in darkness; and by a habit and custom in sinning increases the darkness in his mind.

3. There is in many an affected ignorance, which is very criminal; they are willingly ignorant, as the apostle says of the scoffers who shall arise in the last time; or rather, they are unwilling to understand what they might: they know not, nor will they understand; they walk in darkness; they do not choose to make use of, but shun the means of knowledge, and shut their eyes against all light and conviction; they do not care to come to the light, and love darkness rather than light. With such as these Wisdom expostulates. Prov. i. 22, &c.

4. Some, because of the sinful lusts they indulge themselves in, and their contempt of the means of light and knowledge, and the stubborn-choice they make of error and falshood, are given up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart; as are many among the heathen; Rom. i. 28: and the Jews, who rejected Jesus the Messiah against all light and evidence, had a spirit of slumber given them; Rom. xi. 8; and the followers of antichrist, who received not the love of the truth, had a strong delusion sent them to believe a lie; 2 Thess. ii. 11; others have been left under the power of Satan, the same with the power of darkness. 2 Cor. iv. 4.

Now, whilst men are in this state of darkness, they are ignorant,

(1.) Of God, his nature, and perfections; for, though they may by the light of nature, and from the works of creation, know that there is a God, and some of his perfections, as his wisdom, power and goodness, which manifestly appear in them; yet not so as to glorify him as God, nor so as to preserve them from the worship of other gods before him.

(2.) They are ignorant of Christ, of his person and offices, and of the way of life and salvation by him; as they know neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the distinction between them, so not the concern that each has in the salvation of men. The way of peace they know not, how God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. 1 Cor. v. 19.

(3.) They are ignorant of the Spirit of God; John xiv. 17; neither his person nor his office, as a sanctifier and comforter; nor the operations of his grace on the souls of men: Nicodemus, a master in Israel, could not conceive this. John iii. 9. Nor can a natural man either receive or know the things of the Spirit of God. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

(4.) They are ignorant of themselves, and of their state and condition by nature; they think themselves rich and increased with goods, when

they are wretched, miserable, &c. they reckon themselves alive without the law, in a good condition, and are upon the brink of ruin, like a man on the top of a mast asleep, or in the midst of the sea, insensible of danger.

(5.) They are ignorant of sin and the sad effects of it. If they have any notion of the grosser sins of life, and the evil of them, they do not know that lust in the heart is sin; nor the evil of indwelling sin and corrupt nature; nor consider that the wages of sin is death.

(6.) They are ignorant of the sacred scriptures and the truths contained in them; though they are plain to them that understand, and right to them that find knowledge; Prov. viii. 9; yet they are like a sealed book to carnal men, whether learned or unlearned; the one cannot read them because sealed, and the other because he is not learned.

II. In every regenerate person there is a knowledge of God and of divine things; the new creature, or new man, is renewed in knowledge, &c. Col. iii. 10. Observe,

1. The object of it, God.

(1.) There is a knowledge of God by the light of nature, through the works of creation, which show his eternal power and Godhead, declare his glory, and display his wisdom and goodness; and through the works of Providence, by which he has not left himself without a witness of his being and beneficence; and though these ways and works are past finding out, and a small portion of them is known by men, yet something of God is to be known by them, and that he is, as Jethro said, "greater than all gods;" but then such knowledge was always insufficient to teach men the true worship of God, and influence them to it: notwithstanding this, either they did not worship him at all, or ignorantly worshipped him; that is, not in a right way and manner. Rom. i. 21—28. Nor was this light and knowledge sufficient to point out to them the true way, how incensed Deity may be appeased, or sinners be reconciled to God. Nor was it sufficient to assure them of a future state of happiness, and describe what that is. Life and immortality are only truly brought to light by the gospel.

(2.) There is a knowledge of God by the law, the law of Moses, the moral law: though this came by Moses, it was of God, and shows what is his good and perfect will: it is a transcript of his nature, his justice and holiness; but then it only gives knowledge of him as a lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. The ceremonial law was indeed a shadow of good things to come by Christ; its sacrifices prefigured the sacrifice of Christ; it was the Jews' schoolmaster, that brought them to Christ, and directed them to him.

(3.) There is a knowledge of God which comes by the gospel, the doctrine of grace and truth, that is, by Christ, who lay in the bosom of his Father, and has declared him, his person, his nature, his grace, his mind and will to men: God has spoken by his Son, and made the largest discovery of himself by him; and makes use of the ministers of the gospel to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face or person of Christ. This is a knowledge which is attended with faith in God as a covenant God in Christ; it is a fiducial knowledge: such as know his name put their trust in him; and having knowledge of him as their

portion and exceeding great reward, they hope in him for what they want in time, and for happiness with him hereafter: and such knowledge always includes in it love to God, and the most cordial affection for him; "he who loveth not, knoweth not God," 1 John iv. 8, for if he knew him he could not but love him. Such knowledge is accompanied with a filial fear and reverence of God. Where there is no knowledge of God, there is no fear of God: but where there is knowledge of God, of his grace and goodness, and of his pardoning mercy in Christ, men fear the Lord and his goodness, 1 John ii. 3; for such only may be said to be "filled with the knowledge of his will," &c. Col. i. 9, 10. And a knowledge attended with such graces and fruits of righteousness may be called saving knowledge; that is, salvation is annexed unto it, and follows upon it. John xvii. 3.

Now this knowledge of God may be considered as respecting the three Divine persons in the Godhead distinctly. 1 John v. 7.

(I.) Every renewed soul has a knowledge of God the Father: "I write unto you, little children," says the apostle, 1 John ii. 13, "because ye have known the Father," the Father of Christ, and their Father in Christ. John xx. 17. And this relation is made known to them, as children are taught to know their father: and this the saints know by the Spirit of adoption sent down into their hearts, crying, Abba, Father, and witnessing to their spirits that they are the children of God. They have knowledge of him as their covenant God in Christ, who has blessed them with all covenant-blessings, with the sure mercies of David; with justification by the righteousness of Christ, pardon of sin for his sake, reconciliation and atonement, adoption, and every other blessing; the knowledge of all which draws out their hearts in thankfulness to the Father of Christ, in love to him, and praise of him. Eph. i. 3, 4. Rom. v. 11. Ps. ciii. 1—3.

(II.) Every renewed soul has knowledge of Christ the Son of God, John xvii. 3, where the "only true God," designs God the Father, yet not to the exclusion of Christ the Son of God, for he is expressly called the "true God" also, 1 John v. 20, and "eternal life" is made to depend equally upon the knowledge of the one as upon the knowledge of the other. Now, truly gracious souls have such a knowledge of Christ, as to venture their souls on him, commit their all unto him, and look to him for salvation, and trust in him for it. They have knowledge of him in all his offices, as their Prophet to teach and instruct them; as their Priest, who by his sacrifice has made atonement for their sins, and by his intercession pleads for every blessing for them; and as their King, to rule over them, protect and defend them; and they become willingly subject to his commands and ordinances, and esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right.

(1.) It is an affectionate knowledge, or a knowledge joined with love and affection to Christ.

(2.) It is a knowledge of approbation; they approve of him above all other lovers, and above all other saviours: they reject all others, and say, "Asshur shall not save us," Hos. xiv. 3, we will have no regard to our works, duties, and services, as saviours; but they say of him as Job did, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him; he also shall be my salvation," Job xiii. 15, 16; I will have no other.

(3.) Their knowledge of him is confidential; they know his name, his nature, his abilities, his fulness, and suitableness; and therefore they put their trust in him, and trust him with all they have, and for all they want.

(4.) Their knowledge of him is experimental; they have their spiritual senses exercised on him; they see the Son and believe on him; see the glories of his person, the riches of his grace, &c. They hear his voice with pleasure and delight, the voice of his gospel, so as to understand it, approve of it, and distinguish it from the voice of a stranger; they feel, they handle him the word of life by faith, lay hold on him and retain him: they taste that the Lord is gracious, and savour the things which be of Christ and not of men.

(5.) Their knowledge of Christ is appropriating: it does not lie in generals, but in particulars; they know him themselves and for themselves; they do not only say as the Samaritans did, John iv. 42, but that he is their Saviour and Redeemer; and say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God;" John xx. 28; and with apostle Paul, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me;" and with the church, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." Song ii. 16.

(III.) Every renewed soul has knowledge of the Spirit of God. John xiv. 17. Such as are renewed in the spirit of their minds have a knowledge of him as a Spirit of conviction and illumination, he having convinced them, and having had the eyes of their understandings enlightened by him as a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ. They have knowledge of him as the Comforter, who comforts them by shedding abroad in their hearts the love of the Father and of the Son; by opening and applying the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel, and by taking the things of Christ and showing them to them, and their interest in them. They have knowledge of him also as the Spirit of adoption, who manifests to them their interest in this blessing; and not only by his witnessing do they know their relation to God as children, but also by their being led by him out of themselves to Christ. Rom. viii. 14—16. Moreover, they have knowledge of the Spirit as a "Spirit of grace and of supplication," who first works grace in the soul, and then draws it forth into act and exercise; and perhaps there is no season in the Christian life in which this grace is more drawn forth into exercise than when in prayer, public and private, under the influence of the Spirit of supplication.

To this head, of the object of knowledge, all divine things may be reduced that are knowable, that are to be known, or should be known, by the Christian: there are some things that are not to be known; there are some things which angels know not, yea, which the human soul of Christ knew not in his state of humiliation; this is not to be called ignorance, but nescience, or non-knowledge. "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever." Deut. xxix. 29. The former we should not curiously search into, as not belonging to us; nor should we exercise ourselves in things too high for us, and which are out of our reach; nor should we seek to be wise above what is written: the latter we should study the knowledge of, and to improve therein, even the knowledge of

the several truths and doctrines of the gospel, so as to try and know the things that differ, and to approve the more excellent.

III. The nature and properties of this knowledge.

1. This knowledge is practical. The mere theory of any science, unless reduced to practice, is of little avail. Men may have all knowledge that is notional and speculative, and yet be nothing; a profession to know God and Christ, and in works to deny them is far from being saving knowledge: such who walk as other gentiles do, have not truly learned Christ; the gospel of the grace of God, when it comes with power, "teaches men to deny ungodliness," &c. Tit. ii. 12.

2. It is of a soul-humbling nature; as the instances of Job, Isaiah, and the apostle Paul show; whereas other knowledge puffs up, make men conceited, proud, haughty, and overbearing.

3. It is pleasant, savoury, and satisfying. He that increaseth natural knowledge increaseth sorrow, for the more he knows, he finds he knows less than he thought he did; and this gives him pain that his knowledge is so small; and his larger knowledge attracts the envy of others, and raises an opposition to him; but an increase of spiritual knowledge yields him joy, peace, and comfort: hence we read of the savour of the knowledge of Christ, and of the savour of his good ointment; and of his name being as ointment poured forth, which emits a more fragrant and delightful smell.

4. This knowledge is excellent, yea, super-excellent: the apostle Paul "counted all things but loss for the excellency of it." Phil. iii. 8. It is to be preferred to gold and silver, to jewels and precious stones, and all desirable things; it far excels all other kinds of knowledge. What if a man had knowledge of all the heavenly bodies, and of whatsoever is in the heavenly bodies, and of whatsoever is in the bowels of the earth, or dwells upon it, or grows out of it, so that he could with Solomon speak of trees and their nature, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall; it would be nothing in comparison of the knowledge of Christ, since to know him is life eternal.

5. This knowledge, indeed, is but imperfect in this life; those that know most only know in part, yet it is progressive. There is such a thing as growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ; the light of saints is an increasing one; "The path of the just is as the shining light." Prov. iv. 18. They that know the Lord shall follow on to know him.

6. There are various means which should be made use of for the increase of this knowledge, such as reading the scriptures, which are profitable for doctrine, and for instruction in righteousness; constantly and diligently searching into them; waiting at Wisdom's gates, and watching at the posts of her doors, which is the way to find wisdom and get understanding. Great is the encouragement given to make use of such a method. Conversation with wise and good men; for "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise," grow wiser and wiser. Lastly, fervent prayer. Prov. ii. 3—5. Matt. xvi. 17.

OF TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust.—Ps. xl. 4.

TRUST and confidence signify the same thing, whether with respect to God or men. To trust in men, is to confide or put confidence in them; and so to trust in God is to place confidence in him; and generally in all places where to trust in God is mentioned, the Latin versions are, to confide in him.

I. What confidence signifies, and the sense in which it is sometimes taken, and to be treated of here :

1. It is sometimes used for a profession of religion, taken up in the name and strength of Christ. Heb. iii. 6, 14. A profession of religion is not to be taken up hastily; and when it is taken up, should be held fast with a holy courage and confidence.

2. It sometimes signifies that alacrity in which men engage in any branch of religious service, and continue in it with boldness and intrepidity. Phil. i. 14. Boldness in the ministry of the word is a necessary qualification for a preacher; the apostle was sensible of this, Acts iv. 13—20; and so private Christians, in every branch of religious service, should exercise an humble boldness, and a steadfastness in all the duties of religion; placing their confidence in the Lord; not fearing a lion in the way, or in the streets; nor solicitous what will be the issue and consequence of their persisting in the way of their duty: Daniel and his companions were examples.

3. Sometimes confidence with respect to God in prayer is designed. Eph. iii. 12. Through Christ the Mediator, and faith in him, souls may come to God with great freedom and liberty. 1 John v. 14. Holy boldness and confidence are consistent with reverence of God and submission to his will.

4. Trust or confidence in God may be considered, as it has a connexion with the grace of faith: faith is sometimes expressed by it; 2 Cor. iii. 4; it is at least a fruit and effect of it. 2 Tim. i. 12.

II. The objects of it :

First, There are objects from which we are dehorted from putting our trust in.—1. Idols: trust in which, and in things belonging to them, may be called idolatrous and superstitious confidence. Jer. vii. 4, 14. 2. Men: trust in whom may be called human confidence; and which is not to be placed, no, not in the greatest of men, even not in whole nations, strong and mighty. Isa. xxx. 2. 3. All outward means for safety in times of trouble and danger are of no avail, and are false things to be trusted in: “some trust in chariots, and some in horses.” Ps. xx. 7. Self is another object not to be trusted in, on more accounts than one; and trust in which may be called self-confidence; as when men trust in their wealth, and make gold their hope, and say to the fine gold, “thou art my confidence.” Prov. xi. 28. Nor should a man trust in his wisdom. Prov. iii. 5. Nor should a man trust in his strength: not in his natural strength, as Samson; nor in his moral strength, to perform that which is morally good, to do which he wants both knowledge and strength of him-

self; even the good man should not trust in his spiritual strength; since without Christ he can do nothing. Prov. xxviii. 26.

Secondly, The true and proper objects of trust and confidence are Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit, the true God, the God of our salvation. Ps. lxxv. 5.

1. Jehovah the Father; both as the God of nature and providence, and as the God of all grace: as the former, men are to trust in him to uphold them in their being, to give them all the necessities of life, to preserve them in life, and to protect them from all enemies and dangers, and to enable them to do the work of their generation according to his will. And as the latter, to supply them with his grace, to give them more grace to help them in every time of need; to be their God and guide in life, even unto death, and through it, and bring them safe to his everlasting kingdom and glory. And being satisfied of their interest in him as their covenant-God and Father in Christ, they may be confident: 1. Of his love to them, and of the continuance of it. 2. Of the faithfulness of God in the fulfilment of his promises: he is faithful that has promised, and will never suffer his faithfulness to fail. 3. Of the grace of God to supply all their wants, of which they may be confident, since he is the God of all grace, the author and giver of it, the fountain and source of it, and every supply of it. Ps. lxxxiv. 11. 4. Of his power to keep and preserve them to eternal glory and happiness; and of this they may be confident, since he is able to keep them from falling; and his hand is not shortened that he cannot save.

2. Jehovah the Son is the object of the saints' trust and confidence. Ps. ii. 12.—1. Now, trust and confidence are to be exercised on Christ, not merely as the second and instrumental cause of happiness, but as the first and sole cause of it, he being the author, cause, and captain of eternal salvation: his salvation is suitable, complete, and perfect; nor is there salvation in any other.—2. In his righteousness: a strong act of trust and confidence in Christ and his righteousness is exercised by the church, in Isa. xlv. 24, 25. Christ is, with great confidence and strength of faith, called "the Lord our Righteousness;" and Phil. iii. 4—9.—3. In the grace of Christ, and the fulness of it in him, for the supply of all wants. 2 Tim. ii. 1.

3. Jehovah the Spirit is also the object of the trust and confidence of believers, as he is the Spirit of grace and of supplication: as the Spirit of grace, they trust in him to communicate more grace to them, to increase what is in them, and to draw it forth into lively exercise; and as the Spirit of supplication, in whom they confide for his help and assistance in prayer, and for his prevalent intercession for them, according to the will of God; and as the Spirit of counsel and might, to direct and guide them, and to strengthen them with all might in the inward man; they exercise faith and trust in the Spirit of God, likewise, for the carrying on and finishing his own work of grace in the heart.

III. The encouragement there is to trust in the Lord, and that for all things and at all times.

First, There is encouragement to trust in God for all things.

1. All things are of him: that is, all good things in nature, providence, and grace: all good things in nature. Acts xvii. 25. All things in

providence are at his disposal. Rom. xi. 36. And all things in grace ; all the blessings of grace, as reconciliation, peace, pardon, righteousness, life, and salvation, 2 Cor. v. 18; and all the gifts of grace. James i. 17, 18.

2. All good things are promised by God to his people ; the covenant of grace is ordered in all things, and is full of exceeding great and precious promises, suited to the cases and circumstances of good men.

3. God keeps back no good thing he hath promised, and which he knows is for their welfare. Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 12. They are bid to ask, and it is promised it shall be given. Ps. cxlv. 16—19.

4. God gives all things freely to his people : "Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?" No man can be beforehand with God ; with Christ he "freely gives all things." Rom. viii. 32.

5. God gives all things plenteously, even with a profusion of goodness ; so that the saint, with Jacob can say, "I have enough," or, I have all things ; for God, the living God, "gives richly all things to enjoy." 1 Tim. vi. 17. There is great encouragement to trust in God for all things.

(1.) For things temporal, the outward mercies of life.—1. For food. Ps. xxxvii. 3. With food convenient and sufficient : though not with delicacies, yet with necessaries. Matt. vi. 25.—2. For raiment : and this and food are both from the Lord, and necessary for the support and comfort of life. Gen. xxviii. 20, 21. And, indeed, having these, a saint has enough, and should be therewith content, and for this God should be confided in. Matt. vi. 30.—3. For the preservation of life ; from every accident, as usually so called, from every danger, and from every enemy : and because God not only gives life, but preserves it, he is peculiarly the Saviour and Preserver of them that believe, and put their trust in him. Ps. cxxi. 5—8.—4. For these things may believers pray to God with a holy confidence, believing they shall have the petitions they ask of him. Isa. xli. 17, 18. Luke xi. 13.—5. To trust and confidence in God with respect to those things, they may be encouraged by the experience of themselves and others. Good old Jacob, in his dying moments, expressed, in very strong language, his experience of the Divine goodness throughout the whole of his life. "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day." Gen. xlviii. 15, 16. David frequently takes notice of the goodness of God to him in providence, to encourage his own faith in him, and that of others : "Thou art my hope, O Lord God, thou art my trust from my youth !" Ps. lxxi. 5. And from what he had experienced in time past, even from the very dawn of life, he strongly thus concluded : "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Ps. xxiii. 6. And every believer may look back on the past goodness of God unto him, and encourage himself in the Lord his God, in expectation and confidence of future favours ; for their heavenly Father knows they have need of these things.

(2.) There is great encouragement to trust in the Lord for spiritual things : since God is the God of all grace, whose grace is sufficient for his people now and hereafter ; who has promised to give more grace as

they want it ; and has set up a throne of grace, to which they are encouraged to come with boldness.

(3.) There is encouragement to trust in the Lord for eternal things ; for, 1. God has chosen us through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.—2. God has made promise of eternal things to his people. 3. God has prepared and provided everlasting happiness for his people : it is inconceivable what God has prepared for them that love him.—4. God has called them to his kingdom and glory, even to eternal glory by Jesus Christ. 1 Thess. v. 24.—5. Eternal things are freely given of God ; as grace is freely given, so is glory ; eternal life is the free gift of God through Christ. Christ, as Mediator, has power to give eternal life, and he gives it to all his sheep. 1 John v. 11.

Secondly, There is encouragement to trust in the Lord always. Ps. lxii. 8.—1. In times of darkness and desertion ; it is said to a saint walking in darkness, Isa. l. 10 ; and, wait upon the Lord, who hides his face from the house of Jacob ; since light is sown for the righteous. Mic. vii. 8, 9.—2. In times of temptation saints may trust in the Lord, and be confident that his grace will be sufficient for them. 1 Cor. x. 13.—3. In times of adversity and affliction God leaves in the midst of his church “an afflicted and poor people ;” and it is said of them, “and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.” Zeph. iii. 12.

Thirdly, What that is in the Lord which gives encouragement to trust in him. Every thing in God, and belonging to him ; his nature, the excellences of it ; all his perfections and attributes ; the several names by which he has made himself known ; his covenant and promises ; his word and oath ; his gospel, and the doctrines of it ; the methods of his grace, and the dispensations of his providence. In particular, 1. He is *El-Shaddai*, God all-sufficient ; and therefore to be trusted in for every thing that is wanted, for soul and body, for time and eternity.—2. He is Jehovah, the rock of ages, the everlasting strength of those that put their trust in him. Isa. xxvi. 4.—3. The loving-kindness, grace, mercy, and pity of God, give great encouragement to trust in him. Ps. xxxvi. 7. The proclamation the Lord has made of himself, as gracious and merciful, long-suffering : says David, “I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.” Ps. lii. 8.—4. His truth and faithfulness to his covenant and promises strongly induce to trust in him. Ps. lxxxix. 35.—5. The experience of the saints in all ages, and a man’s own, animate him to put his trust in God. Ps. xxii. 4, 5. And having such a cloud of witnesses before them, and such gracious experiences of their own, in times past, of the goodness of God unto them, they encourage themselves in the Lord their God.

IV. The happiness of those that trust in the Lord.

1. They are in great peace, and will be in greater still. Isa. xxvi. 3. They have peace with God through Christ : they have peace in him, when in the world they have tribulation—a peace which the world cannot take away. Great peace have they which love the Lord, and trust in him ; even perfect peace, at least hereafter ; for the end of such a man is peace, everlasting peace.

2. They are in great safety. “They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed :” they are like mount Zion, well

fortified with the towers, walls, and bulwarks of salvation; and are as immovable. Ps. cxxv. 1.

3. They need be in no fear of any enemy whatever. Isa. xii. 2. Not of men, the greatest, most powerful, and numerous; nor of devils. Satan and all other enemies are conquered ones by Christ: he has destroyed him that had the power of death, the devil, and spoiled his principalities and powers: he has abolished death, and made an end of sin: he has ransomed his people from death and hell, so that they shall not be hurt of the second death; and has saved them from wrath to come, and therefore they have nothing to fear now nor hereafter. Happy men that trust in the Lord!

4. They want no good thing, nor ever shall: "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" says the Psalmist: "Blessed is the man that trusteth in him." Ps. xxxiv. 8.

OF THE NAME OF GOD.

They that know thy name will put their trust in thee.—Ps. ix. 10.

THEY who know God's name, *i. e.* who are acquainted with, and have experienced his merciful nature and disposition, expressed in that name, will take no unlawful methods to escape trials or afflictions, nor put their trust in any but in him. "They that know thy name." Consider the name of God; the properties or qualities of that name; and make some use of the subject.

I. What we are to understand by the name of God.

1. By the name of God we understand God himself. "The name of the God of Jacob defend thee," Ps. xx. 1, *i. e.* the God of Jacob himself be thy defence. "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory," Ps. cxv. 1, that is, unto thee be the glory. The word *name* is frequently in scripture put for the thing or being designed by it, as it is said, "the number of the names were an hundred and twenty," Acts i. 15, that is, the number of the persons. So here, "thy name," that is, thy very being and essence.

2. God's name is his titles that are peculiar to himself. To mention in a few: his name is Jehovah. This is a name peculiar unto the self-existent, supreme and independent God, who hath his being of himself, without depending upon another, even "him who is, and was, and is to come." Thy name alone is Jehovah, "most high over all the earth." Ps. lxxxiii. 18. To encourage our faith, he is sometimes denominated Jehovah Sabaoth, "The Lord of hosts;" to show his absolute authority, that he has all power in heaven and in earth, and the armies of both under his command. Sometimes he is called Jehovah Rophi, because he heals the broken in heart, and binds up all their wounds. Sometimes Jehovah Tsidkenu, "the Lord our Righteousness," because he brings in an everlasting righteousness for the justification of condemned sinners. Sometimes Jehovah Shammah, "the Lord is there," because he is with his people always, unto the end of the world. Sometimes Jehovah Ji-

reh, "the Lord will see, or provide," because, when the poor and needy seek water, he will hear, help, and supply. Sometimes Jehovah Nissi, because he gives a banner unto them that fear him, that it may be displayed because of truth.

3. God's name is his word ; for by it he makes his mind known unto the children of men. "Thou holdest fast my name," that is, thou retainest the gospel in its purity.

4. God's works are his name. Ps. viii. 1. David there viewing the glory of God, as it is expressed in his works, cries, "How excellent is thy name in all the earth !" "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made ; and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth." Ps. xxxiii. 6.

5. God's name is his worship. "In all places where I record my name, there will I come unto you, and will bless you." Ex. xx. 24. This is a glory that he will not give to another ; it is idolatry to make any thing or person, in heaven or in earth, the object of worship and adoration, but God alone. Isa xlii. 8. Matt. iv. 10. And therefore we find that when divine worship is offered unto angels, they reject it as a thing not due to them. Rev. xix. 10 ; xxii. 9. And when it was offered unto Paul and Barnabas, they rejected it with horror and indignation. Acts. xiv. 14, 15.

6. His perfections and excellences are his name : God's *wisdom* is his name : "Wise in heart, and mighty in counsel." His *power* is his name : "the Lord God Almighty." The *holiness* of God is his name, frequently called "the Holy One of Israel." The *justice* of God is his name : "the Lord is a rock, and his work is perfect : a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he." The *love* of God is his name : for "God is love." 1 John iv. 8. The *mercy* of God is his name Ex. xxxiv. 6. His *grace* is his name : "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." His name is his *truth* : "a God of truth, and without iniquity." his name is "the everlasting God." Isa. xl. 28. "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." His name is the omniscient God, that "searcheth the hearts and trieth the reins." Rev. ii. 23.

II. The properties, or qualities of the name of God.

1. His name is a glorious name. Ps. lxxii. 17—19. His name is the glory of the church militant ; for "in him shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." Isa. xlv. 25.

2. This name is a transcendent and incomparable name, "a name above every name that can be named." His name is more excellent than the names of all the great powers of the earth ; for "who among the sons of the mighty can be compared unto him ?" This is one of his royal titles, "the Prince of the kings of the earth, the King of kings, and Lord of lords." Rev. i. 5.

3. The name of God is a most powerful name. Such power and authority is in this name, that "every knee must bow, and every tongue must confess it to the praise of his glory." Such power or strength there is in this name, that devils were cast out, the dead were raised, the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf were opened, and all manner of diseases were healed by the power or virtue of this name, in the infancy of Christianity ; as we read in the histories of the Acts of the Apostles.

4. His name is a most helpful and saving name : " Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth." If a poor soul can but, by the eye of faith, read the name of God, immediately he reads his own salvation in it. " Look unto me, and be ye saved ; for I am God, and there is none else." Isa. xlv. 22. It takes every burden off the back to see this name. " They looked unto him, and were lightened." Ps. xxxiv. 5.

5. His name is a wonderful and a secret name : " His name shall be called Wonderful ;" even they that have it manifested to them in a saving way, it is such a secret and wonderful name, that they are ready to cry with Agur, " What is his name, and what is his Son's name, if thou canst tell ?" Prov. xxx. 4.

6. It is a holy and reverend name : " Holy and reverend is his name ;" Ps. cxi. 9 ; and they that *know* it, will *sanctify* it in their hearts, and make him their *fear*, and their *dread*. So holy is this name, that it sanctifies the soul that knows it.

7. It is a dreadful and terrible name to all devils, the wicked and unbelieving world. The devils fall a trembling at the name of God. And this name, however despised and rejected by the wicked now, yet the day comes, when, at the sight of him, they will cry to the rocks and mountains to cover them.

8. It is a durable and an everlasting name : " His name shall endure for ever ; his name shall last like the sun." As his name is " from everlasting," so it will be " to everlasting." Ps. xc. 2. Thus we see some of the excellent properties and qualities of the name of God.

III. Make some use of the subject.

1. Study to know the name of God. It is the first commandment of the law, to know the name of God ; " Thou shalt have no other gods before me : " till you obey this commandment, and know this name, you can obey no commandment of the law to purpose, and when you obey this one, you will surely obey all the commandments : when you come once to know God, you shall know him as your own God, and be enabled to cry with Thomas, " My Lord, and my God ! " If you would know the name of God, search for it in the volume of his book, for there it is revealed. As a man's name and character are known by his testimonial ; so the name and character of God are to be known by his word. Attend carefully upon the ordinances of his appointment, there it is that his name is recorded. Earnestly pray to God, *who* alone can reveal his name to the soul.

2. If we know his name, we shall frequently think on it with pleasure. Oh ! says David, " My meditations of him are sweet." Ps. civ. 34. It is given as a character of the saints, especially in an evil day, that " they feared the Lord, and thought upon his name." Mal. iii. 16. Isa. xxvi. 8.

3. If we know the name of the Lord, we shall be often speaking to the commendation of his name, be ready to proclaim the glory and excellency thereof. Ps. lxxii. 19. Call in the whole powers of your soul to " bless his holy name," and summon " angels that excel in strength, and all his ministers that do his pleasure, and all his works in all places of his dominions," to help us to celebrate the glory of his worthy name.

4. If we be acquainted with the name of God, we shall *sanctify* it in our hearts, and make it our *fear* and our *dread*; be tender of his honour; tender of his laws; afraid of sin in ourselves, and grieved when we see his laws broken by others; tender of his Spirit; afraid of grieving it; tender of his members and ministers that have his name upon them; tender of his house, and the concerns thereof will be dearer to us than the concerns of our own houses: "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." Ps. lxi. 9.

Lastly, If we know the name of the Lord, we shall trust him. Ps. xx. 7. Trust him with the government of the world in the dark and cloudy day, when the nations are shaking and staggering like a drunken man. Trust him with the government of his church, for he rules in Jacob, he is King in Zion; he has founded it upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail so as to destroy it. Trust him with all our temporal cares and concerns, for our provision and protection; for he has said, his people shall "dwell on high, the place of their defence shall be the munitions of rocks." Isa. xxxiii. 16. Trust him for all our spiritual and eternal concerns, for wisdom and counsel in every difficult case; for peace and reconciliation, for a supply of all our wants, supplies of light, supplies of life, supplies of strength and grace. Trust him for a safe convoy at death, for "he hath the keys of hell and death;" and he has said, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave, I will redeem them from death." "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." Ps. ix. 10.

UNBELIEF ARRAIGNED AND CONDEMNED.

He that believeth not is condemned already.—John iii. 18.

CHRIST having, in the preceding verse, declared the great end and design of his mission by the Father, or of his manifestation in our nature, namely, not that he should "condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved;" in the verse where my text lies, deduces a twofold inference therefrom: "He that believeth on him is not condemned;" that is, he who falls in with the great end of my manifestation in the nature of man, intrusteth his lost and ruined soul into my hand; although he be a sinner, and a great sinner; though the law and justice of God be pursuing him, yet the process shall be stopped, the judgment arrested; and if he be not condemned, he must be absolved and acquitted. I, as his surety, have paid the debt, and obtained the discharge under the hand of justice; I was "made sin" for him. "He that believeth not is condemned already." For which there is a very relevant reason given in the close of the verse, "because he believeth not in the only begotten Son of God."

It is the middle clause of the verse I am to speak to, "he that believeth not is condemned already;" where we may notice,

1. The nature of unbelief.

1. Unbelief does not lie in a person's being in the dark, as to his actual union with Christ or interest in him. A real believer may want the sensible assurance of God's love. Ps. lxxxviii.

2. Unbelief does not lie in the interruption of the actings and exercise of faith. We find the faith of the most eminent saints many times interrupted in its exercise, through the prevalency of temptation, and indwelling corruption. Ps. lxxvii. 7; cxvi. 10, 11.

3. This unbelief, whereof I speak, does not consist in a disbelief of some particular truths of the word, through ignorance, provided they be not fundamental. Every error in the head, through ignorance, does not destroy the being of faith in the heart.

4. I do not here speak of the negative unbelief of the heathen world, who never had the benefit of gospel revelation. Rom. x. 14. Their unbelief or infidelity is more properly their punishment than their sin.

There are three things, any one of which will amount to this capital crime: (1.) A denying of the truth of the gospel; a looking upon the word of God contained in the scriptures as a fiction, or "cunningly devised fable." 2 Pet. i. 16.

(2.) A doubting or wavering uncertainty of mind about the truths of the gospel, will amount to this crime of unbelief, pointed at in my text. Such are unbelievers, in Christ's reckoning; for "he that is not with me," says he, "is against me." Matt. xii. 30.

(3.) When though a person may be convinced in his mind, by rational arguments, that the Bible is the word of God, that the gospel is of a divine extract; yet does not fall in with the great design of the scriptures, by "receiving Christ, and resting upon him alone for salvation," as he is there presented and discovered. We have the design of the whole word of God expressed in one verse, John xx. 31.

1. Unbelief offers the highest indignity to a trinity of persons in the glorious Godhead, that a creature is capable of. He despises the love of the Father, who gave his only-begotten Son; tramples upon the blood of the Son, as if it were an unholy thing; runs directly cross to the work and office of the Spirit, in the economy of redemption.

2. Unbelief injures all the glorious attributes and perfections of the Divine nature; rebels against awful and adorable majesty and sovereignty. The authority of God is, in a peculiar manner, interposed in the command of believing: God speaks of this command, as if he had never given another to the sons of men. 1 John iii. 23. Unbelief flies in the face of all this authority; spurns against the bowels of infinite and amazing love.

3. Unbelief runs directly cross to the most glorious designs that ever God had in view; I mean, his designs in the work of redemption through Christ. 1. God's design in redemption was the illustration and manifestation of his own glorious excellences; unbelief darkens and affronts every one of them. 2. God's design is, that in all things Christ should have the pre-eminence; that he should have a name above every name: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." Unbelief refuses to bow or submit to the name, Jehovah Tsidkenu. Jer. xxiii. 6. Rom. x. 3. Rev. xix. 16. Join in a confederacy with the e

who refuse to stoop unto his royal sceptre. Ps. ii. 2. 3. God's design in redemption is, that grace only should reign, so as he that glorieth may glory only in the Lord. The language of unbelief is, not grace, but self shall reign.

4. Unbelief is of a more criminal nature, in God's reckoning, than any sin that can be named or thought upon. Unbelief far surpasses the sin of our first parents : they sinned only against God as a Creator, but the unbeliever sins against him as a Redeemer ; consequently he sins against more love than they could sin against, before the revelation of Christ. Unbelief is more criminal than the sin of the Jews in crucifying the Lord of glory : they crucified him, when veiled and disguised under the form of a servant ; but the unbeliever crucifies him upon his throne, when the evidences of his being the true Messiah are completed by his resurrection from the dead. Rom. i. 4. Unbelief is worse than the sin of Sodom, which provoked God to rain hail out of heaven upon its inhabitants. Christ tells us, that Sodom and Gomorrah will have a cold hell in comparison of those who have had the offers of a Saviour in the gospel, and yet have rejected him. Matt. xi. 24. All the sins of the blinded nations are not comparable to the sin of unbelief : we have a black roll of their sins, Rom. i. towards the close ; but yet Christ speaks of them as no sins, in comparison of the sin of those who remain in unbelief under the dispensation of the gospel : "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had had NO SIN, but now they have no cloak for their sin." Unbelief is a sin attended with aggravations which are not to be found in the sin of devils. The devil never rejected a Saviour, as the unbeliever does ; for "he took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham." The unbeliever rejects God appearing in his own nature, saying, "I will not have this man to rule over me."

5. Unbelief is the spring and ringleader of all othere sins. Every sin is a turning away from the living God ; and whence comes this but from an evil heart of unbelief ? Heb. iii. 12. The name of the sin of unbelief may be Gad, for a troop doth follow it.

Unbelief is the principal pillar of the devil's kingdom in the world, and in the soul of man. Let this pillar be but broken, and all his strongholds go to ruin. Faith is the radical grace, which gives life and spirit to all the other graces ; it is the spring of all true gospel-obedience, called the obedience of faith : so, in like manner, unbelief is the radical sin, which gives life and spirit unto all vicious habits and acts of disobedience in the life and conversation. Faith is a shield that beats back the darts of Satan ; so unbelief is a shield that beats back all the good motions of the Spirit of God. Faith is the victory whereby we overcome the world ; unbelief is the victory whereby the world overcomes us. 1 John v. 4.

II. Inquire a little into some of its causes.

1. The devil has a great hand in it. Faith is the great engine whereby his kingdom and interest are overthrown in the world ; and, therefore, he studies by all possible means to keep the sinner under the power of unbelief. He uses a great many wiles and stratagems. His first and principal care is to hush the house, and keep it in peace and

quiet. He persuades the man that his state is good: that though he be a sinner, yet his sins are but small; that it cannot consist with the justice of God to pursue such small sins with eternal punishment. If the man's conscience cannot be satisfied, he studies to lay him asleep with the prospect of general and absolute mercy. If, again, this lying refuge be beat down by the hail of divine terrors, he betakes himself to another artifice; he conceals and hides the attributes of mercy, presenting God to the soul as an implacable and inexorable Judge, who will by no means acquit the guilty; and thus, by hiding the remedy, he studies to drive the sinner to despair. But whatever views he gives of God to the sinner, whether in his justice or mercy, his design is still to carry the soul off from Christ. He persuades the convinced soul, that he is not fit enough for Christ; he must be so humble, so holy, so penitent, and have this and the other qualification, before he adventure to come to Christ. Thus the devil has a great hand in unbelief; for he knows well, that he who believes not shall be damned, let him do else whatever he pleases.

2. Ignorance is another great cause of unbelief. "My people," says the Lord, "are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Ignorance of God in his holiness, justice, and other adorable excellences; ignorance of the law of God in its purity, extent, and spirituality; ignorance of sin in its exceeding sinfulness; ignorance of the great mystery of godliness, the union of the two natures in the person of our wonderful Immanuel; ignorance of his substitution in the room of sinners; ignorance of the free access sinners have unto Christ, and his whole salvation, in and by a confirmed testament or promise, which is put in their hand, and left to them. Heb. iv. 1.

3. Pride is another great cause of unbelief; this is just the poison of the old serpent, who, being lifted up with pride, fell into condemnation: by pride he ruined all mankind: "Ye shall be as gods." Men naturally, will wear no other garment than that which, like the spider, they spin out of their own bowels. But what says God? Isa. lix. 6. Man will needs enter into life and glory by the door of the law, which God has condemned, and barred against all mankind, since the fall; for "by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified," however high you may climb heavenward, upon the scaffold of the law, in your own conceit, and in the esteem of others. See Matt. xi. 21; vii. 27.

4. A pretended humility and self-denial is another great bar in the way of believing, to many; they thrust away Christ and the mercy of God from them, under a pretence that they are not fit for it: and to refuse Christ and his salvation, tendered in the word of grace, under this pretext, that we are great sinners, is all one as if a traitor should refuse his prince's pardon because he has been in arms against him; or as if one should refuse to accept of a free discharge, because he is a bankrupt drowned in debt.

5. A secret jealousy, as if God were not in good earnest with us, when he offers Christ and his salvation to us in the gospel.

III. The sentence.

1. Prove that the sentence is passed against the unbeliever. I need not stand to prove this when it lies so plain and clear in the text: "He that believeth not is condemned already." The unbeliever is, as it were,

arraigned before the bar of Divine justice ; process is laid against him, and he found guilty of the violation of the royal law of heaven, and of contemning the glorious remedy provided and offered in the gospel ; and thereupon sentence goes forth against him from the mouth of the great Judge. This man believes not in my Son, and therefore I condemn him to death everlasting. "He that believes not in the Son shall not see life." John iii. 36.

2. The unbeliever is condemned already.—(1.) In the court of the law, as a covenant by which he is seeking to be justified and saved : "there is one that accuseth you, even Moses." Rom. iii. 19. By Moses we must understand the law of Moses. "As many as are under the law, are under the curse."—(2.) The unbeliever is already condemned in the court of the gospel, my meaning is, that the sentence passed against him in the court of the law, is aggravated and heightened by his contempt of gospel-grace. All I intend by it is comprised in Heb. ii. 3 ; x. 28, 29.—(3.) The unbeliever is condemned already in the court of his own conscience. Conscience is God's deputy and vicegerent ; and, in the name and authority of heaven, it keeps a court in every man's breast. John xvi. 8, 9. And O ! when once conscience, by the direction of the Spirit, begins to smite for this sin of unbelief, there is no sin in the world that appears in such a formidable hue.—(4.) The unbeliever is already condemned in the court of the church ; or may I call it, in the ministerial court. Ministers, by virtue of the commission they have received from their great Lord and Master. Matt. xvi. 19.—(5.) The unbeliever is condemned in the court of the great God. It is true, every one of these courts I have mentioned is his ; he sits as supreme Judge in each of them, but they are only his inferior courts ; and while the sinner's sentence is pending before them, there is still access for an appeal by faith unto a throne of grace, or mercy-seat ; but when once a man comes to be personally cited before the bar of God at death or judgment, no farther appeal can be admitted. "Consider this, ye that forget God." Ps. l. 22.

3. A few qualities of this sentence of condemnation passed against the unbelieving sinner.—(1.) It is a most mature and deliberate sentence : the sentence is well advised and ripened, before it be pronounced or executed. "The Lord is a God of judgment. The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed : " he ponders the crime before he sentences the criminal. It is resolved among the councils of heaven, that every unbelieving sinner shall be condemned to "the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Rev. xxi. 8.—(2.) It is a most righteous sentence. God will be clear when he judges.—(3.) It is a most awful and terrible sentence, and it cannot be otherwise, for it is pronounced by a terrible Judge. "With God is terrible majesty." He cutteth off the spirits of princes, and is terrible to the kings of the earth. The sentence goes forth from a terrible tribunal. The nature of the sentence itself is terrible, for it is a sentence of condemnation. To be condemned to a natural bodily death is terrible ; but to be condemned to eternal death, to be "punished with everlasting destruction," 2 Thess. i. 9, has a terror in it that surpasses expression.—(4.) When

the sentence comes to be uttered by God against the unbeliever, personally appearing before his tribunal, upon the back of death, it becomes an irrevocable sentence : it stands ratified for ever.

Lastly, the application.

1. See hence a very sufficient reason why ministers of the gospel do so much urge the necessity of faith. Why, it is for unbelief that sinners are condemned already.

2. See hence the miserable and mournful condition of the generality of gospel hearers ; they are a company of condemned men, under sentence of death. The solemnity of the bench adds terror to the criminal ; and you may see with what solemnity the bench is to be reared, Matt. xxv. 21. Read your doom, Matt. xxv. 41.

3. How ill-grounded the joy and triumph of a Christless, unbelieving sinner ! We should think that man beside himself, who being under sentence of death, and to be brought forth in a little space unto the place of execution, would spend any little time he has in eating, drinking, dancing, and revelling ; yet this is the very case with the generality. Isa. l. 11.

4. See hence how fitly the gospel is called a joyful sound. Ps. lxxxix. 15. Among other reasons why it gets that denomination, this is none of the least ; it brings a proclamation of life to the sons of death, a sound of liberty to the captive, and of pardon to the poor sinner condemned already. Isa. liii. 1.

5. It is every man's duty and interest to examine and try whether he be under this heavy sentence or not. You who never yet saw yourselves to be condemned in the court of the law and conscience for sin, and particularly for the sin of unbelief, you are surely under sentence of death. John xvi. 8, 9. You whose minds are so blinded with ignorance and prejudice at Christ. 2 Cor. iv. 4, 5. You who are yet wedded to the law as a covenant, and are seeking life and righteousness by that first husband, you are to this moment under the sentence of death ; for, "as many as are of the law are under the curse." O, then, sirs, be concerned at your hearts to get rid of that dismal sentence you are under ! Isa. xliii. 25 ; lv. 3.

OF THE GRACE OF HOPE.

For we are saved by hope.—Rom. viii. 24, 25.

"FAITH is the substance of things hoped for." The same word is sometimes rendered *trust*, and sometimes *hope* ; thus in Eph. i. 12, "who first trusted in Christ," is in the margin, "who first hoped in Christ." Concerning this grace we may observe :

I. The object, ground, and foundation of it ; not any creature whatever, angel or man ; nor any creature enjoyment : "If I have made gold my hope," the object of it, says Job, meaning he has not, though some have placed their hope of future good in it. Nor creature merits, of which there are none ; a creature cannot merit any thing at the hand

of God. Nor any creature-righteousness, which is the hope of the moralist: such a hope is like a spider's web, spun out of their own bowels: has no strength, solidity, nor substance in it. "What is the hope of the hypocrite?" Job xxvii. 8. But Jehovah, the Creator and Lord of all, is the principal object of hope, and the only solid, sufficient ground and foundation of it: "Blessed is the man whose hope the Lord is!" Jer. xvii. 7.

1. God, especially considered, is the object of hope; "Hope in God." Ps. xlii. 11. "O the hope of Israel." Jer. xiv. 8. The grounds of which hope in God are his grace, goodness, and mercy: he has proclaimed his name. Ex. xxxiv. 6. And it is the abundance of these which lays a solid foundation for hope: "Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is mercy," &c. He is plenteous in it, rich in mercy. Ps. cxxx. 7; cxxxi. 3.

2. God, personally considered, is the object of hope; God, Father, Son, and Spirit. God the Father, who is called "the God of hope;" not only because he is the author and giver of that grace, but because he is the object of it. Rom. xv. 13. "That faith and hope might be in God," *i. e.* in God the Father. 1 Pet. i. 21. And Christ the Son of God is called our hope: "Christ in you the hope of glory," Col. i. 27, *i. e.* the object and foundation of it; which are his blood, righteousness, and sacrifice. The Spirit of God also is equally the object of hope as of faith and confidence; that he will assist in the exercise and completion of every grace.

3. The less principal objects of hope, connected with the Divine persons, are the promises of God, and that therein promised, represented as the object of hope. "In his word do I hope;" Ps. cxxx. 5; the ground of which "I hope" is in the faithfulness and power of God. "Faithful is he who hath promised; nor will he suffer his faithfulness to fail." He is also able to perform; and on this footing "Abraham believed in hope against hope; the hand of the Lord is not shortened." Things to be hoped for are represented, Rom. viii. 24,

1. As things unseen, of which faith is the evidence; and gives encouragement to the exercise of hope on them. "Hope that is seen is not hope." The glories of another world are things not seen, so as thoroughly to be understood and comprehended; yet there is hope of enjoying them on the Divine promise. Heb. vi. 19.

2. They are things future, yet to come, and therefore hoped for: hence believers are exhorted "to hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto them at the revelation of Jesus Christ;" when he shall be revealed, appear a second time; and therefore are directed "to look for that blessed hope," the hope laid up in heaven, the happiness to be enjoyed "at the appearing of the great God." Tit. ii. 13.

3. Things hoped for are difficult to obtain: many tribulations lie in the way to the kingdom; the gate is strait, the way narrow; "the righteous are scarcely saved." Hence there must be a labouring and striving to enter in, of which there is hope; and therefore,

4. Hope is of things possible, or otherwise would despair. Jer. xviii. 12. But there is "hope in Israel concerning this thing," eternal life and happiness, as well to all things leading to it; therefore, "it is good that

a man should hope." Things the objects of hope are more particularly salvation by Christ, pardon, &c.

1. "Salvation by Christ." As soon as a soul is made sensible of its lost condition, its inquiry is, "What must I do to be saved?" And discovering the way of salvation by Christ, and directed to him for it, it is encouraged to hope in him for it: the difficulties in the way to salvation are many, yet it is possible to be had, and hope is conversant with it—(1.) Salvation is wrought out by Christ; "therefore, let Israel hope in the Lord." Ps. cxxx. 7. Salvation is in Christ, and to be had by him and no other; "neither is there salvation in any other." It may be hoped for from him. Jer. iii. 23. (2.) Great encouragement is given by Christ to sensible sinners to hope for and expect salvation: "Look unto me." Isa. xlv. 22. "Come unto me." Matt. xi. 28, 29. "He that cometh." (3.) Salvation in and by Christ is free: "Not by works of righteousness that we have done." (4.) Since it is of free grace, they may be encouraged to hope. (5.) Salvation by Christ is for sinners, the chief of sinners, "while we are yet sinners;" Rom. v. 8; and this is no small encouragement to hope. The gospel declaration gives encouragement to hope: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." Acts xvi. 31.

2. "Pardon of sin" through the blood of Christ: this is immediately sought for by a soul convinced of sin. With David it says, "For thy name's sake, O Lord." Ps. xxv. 11. "If thou, Lord." Ps. cxxx. 3. With the publican, "God be merciful." There is ground to hope for pardon through the sacrifice of Christ.

(1.) God is a sin-forgiving God: he abundantly pardons, pardons abundance of sin, and abundance of sinners, and all freely. Isa. xliii. 25. There is none like him on this account. Mic. vii. 18. Promised in the covenant: "I will forgive their iniquity." Proclaimed by his name. Ex. xxxiv. 5—7.

(2.) The blood of Christ has been shed on account of sin, and the pardon of it. Rom. iii. 25. 1 John i. 9.

(3.) Christ is exalted for this end. Acts v. 31.

(4.) The declaration made of it in the gospel gives encouragement to hope. Luke xxiv. 47.

(5.) The instances of pardon recorded in scripture encourage the soul to hope: Manasseh, Saul, many of the Corinthians are pardoned.

3. The blessings of grace, and supplies of it in the present life, are the objects of hope, and in the exercise of which there is much encouragement; for so long as there is a throne of grace, and a God of grace sitting on it, inviting souls to come to it for grace and mercy; so long as there is a fulness of grace in Christ, and the communication of it not cut off, we may comfortably hope, that God in Christ "will supply all our need." Phil. iv. 19.

4. There are blessings to be enjoyed after death, which are the objects of hope.

(1.) The resurrection of the body is an object of hope, and is so represented. "Of the hope and resurrection of the dead," *i. e.* of the hope of it, "I am called in question." Acts xxiii. 6. There is good ground to hope for it, from the resurrection of Christ, and from the union of his people to him; and they are represented as "waiting for the adoption." Rom. viii. 23.

(2.) Eternal life to be enjoyed in soul and body, is a grand object of hope, and is therefore called "the hope of eternal life;" Tit. iii. 7; and "hope of glory;" Col. i. 27; "the blessed hope;" Tit. ii. 13; and "hope laid up in heaven;" Col. i. 5; all intending the happiness hoped for, and for which there is ground to hope.

(1.) From its being a free gift. "The gift of God is eternal life." Rom. vi. 23. "It is your Father's good pleasure." Luke xii. 32.

(2.) It is in the hand of Christ to give: he gives grace and glory, and therefore they may be hoped for from him. Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

(3.) From the promise of it in Christ, called "the promise of life." John vi. 40.

(4.) From the preparations and prayers of Christ for it. John xiv. 2, 3; xvii. 24.

(5.) From the Spirit's work in the hearts of men, who works them for that self-same thing, eternal life. "Grace is a well of water springing up to eternal life." John iv. 14.

II. The subjects of the grace of hope.

1. Not angels, good or bad; good angels are in the full enjoyment of God. The devils have a kind of faith, but they have no hope.

2. Only men, these not all men; some are described as without hope.

3. Only regenerate men are subjects of the grace of hope; "begotten again to a lively hope." 1 Pet. i. 3. When first quickened by the Spirit they are the "prisoners of hope," and enabled to hope for deliverance.

4. Believers in Christ are partakers of this grace, and they only: faith and hope always go together; though one may be in exercise before the other, yet they go together, and assist each other. "Now abideth faith, hope;" faith is the groundwork of hope, and lies at the bottom of it. Heb. xi. 1.

5. They are the Israel of the Lord, whose hope the Lord is, and who are encouraged to hope in him; all sensible sinners who are born again come under this character, and are encouraged to hope in the Lord. "Let Israel hope in the Lord;" hence he is called "the hope of Israel." Jer. xiv. 8.

6. The separate souls of saints, after death, in heaven, seemed to be possessed of, and to be in the exercise of the grace of hope, particularly with respect to the resurrection of their bodies; as the flesh of Christ, by a figure, is said to rest in hope of the resurrection of his body whilst in the grave. Ps. xvi. 9. So the souls of the saints.

III. The causes of the grace of hope, or whence it springs.

1. The efficient cause is God, hence called "the God of hope," not only the object but the author. God the Father begets men to a lively hope. 1 Pet. i. 3. It is the gift both of the Father and of Christ. "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself." 2 Thess. ii. 16. And it is through the power of the Holy Ghost. Rom. xv. 13.

2. The moving cause is the grace and mercy of God, hence it is called "good hope through grace:" it is ascribed to the "abundant mercy" of God. 1 Pet. i. 3.

3. The gospel is the means of it, by which it is wrought; therefore called "the hope of the gospel." Col. i. 23.

4. There are many things serve to promote and increase it: the whole

scripture hath this tendency. Rom. xv. 4. The promises thereof, the goodness, faithfulness, and power of God, displayed in fulfilling them: the things said concerning the person, offices and grace of Christ, his resurrection, are all subservient to this end, "that our faith and hope might be of God;" the experience of the saints. Rom. v. 4.

IV. The effects of hope.

1. It "maketh not ashamed." Rom. v. 5. And as this grace makes not ashamed, those who have it need not be ashamed of it: "let me not be ashamed of my hope." Ps. cxix. 116.

2. It weans from the world and the things thereof; it enables us to rejoice in hope of a better, "having a desire to depart." Phil. i. 23.

3. It carries cheerfully through all the difficulties of life, and makes hard things easy. "If in this life only we had hope." Rom. xii. 12.

4. Yields support in death. "The righteous hath hope in his death." Prov. xiv. 32.

V. The properties of this grace.

1. It is called a good hope. 2 Thess. ii. 16. It has God and Christ, and the promises, for its foundation. It is of the greatest uses in life and death: for "we are saved by hope." Rom. viii. 24.

2. It is a lively or living hope. The subject of it is a living man, spiritually alive. It has eternal life for its object. Tit. iii. 7. Has for its foundation a living Christ. It is of an enlivening nature. Heb. iii. 6. Rom. v. 2.

3. It is of a purifying nature. "Every man that hath this hope in him." 1 John iii. 3.

4. It is compared to an anchor, because of its utility. Heb. vi. 19. This world is a sea: the church, and so every believer, is like a ship sailing on it: Christ is the pilot who guides it, hope is the anchor to it; and as the ground on which the anchor is cast is out of sight, so Christ, on whom hope is fixed, is unseen. A ship when at anchor is kept steady, so the soul by hope: "none of these things move it." Ps. xlii. 11. Jer. xvii. 17.

5. It is compared to a helmet. 1 Thess. v. 8. This is a defence for the head, a cover in the day of battle. So hope in Christ covers the head in a day of battle, and makes a man courageous to fight the battles of the Lord; hope, like a helmet, is an erector, a lifter up of the head in the midst of difficulties; hope keeps up the head in the day of battle, so that the hoping, believing soul can "glory in tribulations." Rom. v. 3.

THE HOPE OF THE HYPOCRITE.

Whose hope shall be cut off, and whose trust shall be a spider's web.
Job viii. 14.

THESE are the words of Bildad, verses 2—15, wherein he sheweth the justice of God in dealing with men according to their works. "Whose hope shall be cut off," &c. Consider,

I The character of the person, the hypocrite.

The hypocrite hides wickedness under a cloak of goodness; clouds without rain, wells without water, trees without fruit, the ape of piety, the mask of sin: which they do not put off, but throw a cloak over it.

The hypocrite derives his honour from his birth; the child of God from his new birth. The hypocrite hath his perfection from the body, from his complexion and constitution; but the Christian hath them from a higher source.

The hypocrite serves God with that which costs him nothing, only going down the stream. The hypocrite is only disposed to some virtues; he only refrains from those vices that are contrary to his taste and humour, as the elephant abhors the mouse.

The hypocrite puts reason in the place of religion; his understanding will not bow to faith, nor his free will to God's free grace.

The hypocrite's virtues are only shining vices; he cries up virtue, and exclaims against vice rather by speech than practice.

The hypocrite hears the word without real benefit; he assembles with the pious, whom he deceives, as he hopes to deceive Christ. He is the stony ground; he is sermon-proof, repels conviction, takes nothing to himself, or shakes it off as sheep do rain. He will only hear such ministers as suit his humour: Balaam suits Balak; a lying prophet, Ahab. He will neglect or slight others. He hearkens more for eloquence than substance; a wooden sword that draws no blood suits him. He uses the word as children their books, looking more at the pictures than the lesson. He loves to hear of Christ's miracles, but he draws a curtain before his own picture. He has some carnal end in hearing; to be reputed a good churchman, perhaps to cavil and find fault; to please a friend. Festus thus pleased Agrippa; and Ahab heard Micaiah to please Jehoshaphat.

Sometimes he trembleth under the word, but he shifts it off; as a tree shaken by the wind takes deeper root, so is he more rooted in his sins. Felix's fearfulness surpriseth the hypocrite before he is aware; he is ashamed of himself, angry at the preacher, and, Cain-like, he runs from God, instead of going to him. He is a seeming friend, but a secret foe, to the gospel: when the word is a hammer, he is an anvil; when it is fire, he is clay.

If he pray, it is with his tongue, not with his heart. The hypocrite acts according to his *wishes*; looking no farther, like Israel for quails. He is also *wavering* and *double-minded*. He quarrelleth with God, if not answered; "this evil is of the Lord." "He regardeth iniquity in his heart." Ps. lxi. 18. His prayers never reach heaven, they are scattered in their passage; as Jehoshaphat's ships, 1 Kings xxii. 48. But the prayer of the upright, like the ships of Solomon, 1 Kings ix. 26—28.

II. The hope of the hypocrite.

1. The foundation or objects of his hope. The hope of a hypocrite has no foundation; it is founded on the sand. Matt. vii. 26. The hope of the hypocrite shall deceive him. "He leaneth upon his house." Job viii. 15. Matt. vii. 27. "It will not stand." Isa. lix. 5, 6. Jer. vii. 4. Thus "the hope of the hypocrite shall perish: their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost." Job xi. 20. He shall never receive

the good he hopes for, and shall see others receive that good he grieves for : he cannot escape the danger he fears, nor meet with the deliverance he desires ; his hopes are dying, and he hath no hope but to die.

The text says, "his hope shall be cut off." Hypocrites never please God, and at last they shall not please themselves. Ezek. xx. 43. No man sins at so dear a rate as the hypocrite, "whose hope shall be cut off;" *i. e.* whose hope shall loathe him. The thing he hoped for shall flee away ; heaven shall be shut against, or he shall loathe his hope ; the very hope which he had shall be grievous and vexatous. How extremely shall the hypocrite grieve, who falls as low as hell, when his hopes were raised as high as heaven ! "Whose hope shall be cut off." Isa. xiv. 13, 14. The expectation which the hypocrite has shall come to an end ; despairing is the cutting off of hope. "Will the hypocrite hope always?" no ; his hope shall be cut off. Isa. xxix. 8. Will the hypocrite pray always? no ; at least his prayer shall be cut off.

"Whose trust shall be as the spider's web." Trust is the strength of hope, whose settled trust, a trust without jealousy. The hypocrite never suspects himself ; his heart saith, "all is well:" which imports boldness and confidence, security and peace. Rev. xvii. 17.

"It shall be a spider's web"—"a spider's house." Isa. lix. 5. They trust in vanity and speak lies.

1. The trust, or hope, of the hypocrite is a spider's web, because he forms it, as it were, out of his own bowels : she doth not hew her stone out of any quarry, nor fetch her timber from any forest. The bee makes a house, and fetches her materials from this and that flower ; but the hypocrite's hope is the spider's web, made out of their own substance.

2. Because the profession and all the works of the hypocrite are weak and unstable. There is some curiosity in the spider's web, but there is neither strength nor stability ; her house will bear no stress of weather, much less force of battery : the spider's web is no match for a broom. Thus the hope of the hypocrite, notwithstanding the fine thread of his professions, his accurate weavings and contrivances, when it comes to the trial it will not stand. Matt. vii. 27: When the storm comes that house must fall ; and when the broom comes this must down.

3. The spider makes her web to catch and ensnare ; she has a house to lie in, and to entrap with ; her house is a snare. The profession of the hypocrite is a spider's web in this notion ; he ensnares and deceives the simple ; he makes gain of godliness. This web is so fairly woven, that it appears beautiful without ; yet the Lord looks through all the coverings and sees the heart.

4. The hypocrite, like the spider, thinks himself perfectly safe ; when once lodged in his profession he apprehends no danger. 1 Thess. v. 3.

5. In the issue it shall perish like a spider's web : when the house is swept, down go the spiders' webs. Thus it is with the hope of hypocrites ; when the Lord sweeps his house, his church. Ezek. xiii. 13—16. Isa. xxxii. 14. Thus, "the poor," the Lord's poor, "hath hope, and iniquity stoppeth her mouth." Job v. 16.

ON PATIENCE.

Follow after patience.—1 Tim. vi. 11.

AMONG all the graces that adorn the soul of a Christian, like so many jewels of various colours and lustres, there is not one more brilliant than this of patience ; not one that brings more glory to God, or contributes so much towards making and keeping peace on earth ; not one which renders a Christian more happy within himself, or more agreeable to all about him. Even they who themselves possess it not, are sure to commend it in others. They set their seal to the truth, though by so doing they condemn their own practice. Consider,

I. The nature of patience.

Patience is a holy behaviour in affliction ; it is not an insensibleness of present evils, nor an indifference to future good : “no affliction for the present is joyous.” Our Lord himself was sensible of his sufferings, nor should we be coldly affected to the blessings for which God has caused us to hope ; that would be a reflection on the excellency of the blessings ; would make us negligent in our endeavours to obtain them.

Christian patience is a disposition that keeps us calm and composed in our minds, and steady in the practice of our duty, under the sense of our afflictions, or the delay of our hopes. It is sometimes called long-suffering, or, a length of mind. It is directly opposite to hastiness of spirit.

1. Patience secures the possession of our souls in every circumstance that tends to discompose our minds. Patience is a soul enjoying itself in every condition ; an even sea in all winds ; a serene soul in all weathers ; a thread even spun with every wheel of providence. Our Lord exhorts his disciples, when he had foretold the sufferings and dangers to which they would be exposed : “in patience possess ye your souls.” Luke xxi. 19. Smart trials, or the deferring of our hopes, are apt to make our hearts sick ; patience guards the soul, and keeps it sedate and sober under every affliction.

2. Patience prevents hasty and rash conclusions, either from present trouble, or the suspension of desired good. We are prone to make hasty conclusions from present appearances, and to charge the Lord foolishly ; to question the truth of his promises, if they are not accomplished in our way and time : or to suspect his mercy and goodness because afflictions are our present lot. Ps. lxxvii. 7—9. Patience disposeth us to rest in God ; “I reckon the sufferings.”—“He who hath delivered, and doth deliver, will yet deliver.” The patient soul is neither without fears, nor without hope : neither over sensible, nor under sensible ; affected with all, cast down with nothing ; quiet when tossed, very quiet when extremely tossed ; expecting his salvation from God, when none can be had from man. “Though he slay me.” Job xiii. 15. Patience is a soul at rest in God ; substance gone, Ziglag burned, all mourning, many murmuring, stoning ; David makes up all in God. 1 Sam. xxx. 1—6.

3. Patience will fortify against any unlawful methods for accomplish-

ing our deliverance or desires : the impatient endeavour by any means to obtain their wishes. When the Philistines were coming against Saul with a formidable army, and his own people were much discouraged, he would not wait for deliverance in God's time and way. 1 Sam. xiii. 5—14. Patience restrains from unlawful expedients : "He that believeth shall not make haste."—"The Lord will provide," is the language of patience under the greatest sufferings.

4. Patience disposes the soul to perseverance in the way of duty, whatever discouragements may arise from the pressure of afflictions, or the deferring of hopes. This is the most essential part of patience, to persevere in our Christian course, whether afflictions attend us, or whatever it may cost us. The impatient are apt to "faint and be weary in their minds," and grow remiss : "but the righteous shall hold on his way : " Job xvii. 9 ; hence we are exhorted to "run with patience the race that is set before us."

II. Endeavour to recommend this grace to your esteem, and excite you to the attainment of it.

1. Patience is a virtue common to us with God. Long-suffering is his darling attribute ; and what is dear in his sight ought to be no less precious in ours. And how marvellous is his patience, who daily pours his blessings on those who as daily offend, affront, and dishonour him : "He makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good ;" he does not exclude the worst of us from those blessings to which the best of us have no title. For the benefit of the impious as well as the pious, the ungrateful as well as the grateful, the seasons take their rounds, the elements work together, the light and heat exert their friendly influence, the fountains send forth their salutary streams, and the pastures flourish. The gospel is still preached to those who slight it ; the cup of salvation is still held forth to those who have so often dashed it from them ; and although God be provoked every day, he holds his hand, and waiteth to be gracious, although he have the power in his own hands, and the weapons of his indignation are all ready, he defers to strike ; and while judgment sleeps, mercy calls night and day to sinners, "Why will ye die ?" His truth is denied ; his Son crucified ; and his long-suffering is made an argument against his existence ; and he is still patient. "What is man, then, that he should complain ?" Lam. iii. 39.

2. The patience which we so much admire in God, shone forth yet more amazingly in the person of his Son. Was ever patience like that patience, which descended from a throne of glory, bore a long imprisonment in the womb, to sanctify sinners ; and lay in a stable, to bring them to a kingdom ? Behold the Master baptized by his servants ; and, with his disciples he lived not as their Lord, but as the servant of all. How tenderly did he bear with their ignorance and infirmities, leading them gently as they were able to follow him ! How patiently did he bear the contradiction of sinners ! how was he wounded, who heals every disease ! how was he fed with gall and wormwood, who reaches out to his people the fruits of paradise and the cup of salvation ! and, at his crucifixion, when the heavens were confounded, and the earth trembled, "he opened not his mouth." Isa. liii. 7. He endured without murmuring, all that earth and hell could inflict, till he had put the last stroke to the

most finished picture of perfect patience, and prayed for his murderers.

3. The patience thus practised by Christ is enjoined by his gospel, being indeed the badge of that gospel and its professors. "Ye have heard," says our Lord. Matt. v. 43. "Follow after patience." 1 Tim. v. 11. 2 Pet. i. 6. "In your patience." Luke xxi. 19.

4. We find all the saints of God, who have been eminent for their faith in Christ, to have been eminent for their patience, without which their faith must have failed in the day of trial; it being not through faith alone, but "through faith and patience," that they "inherited the promises." Heb. vi. 12. Faith begat patience, which, like a dutiful child, proved the support of its parent. Patience preserved Noah's faith all the time the ark was building, and while it floated on the waters; through patience Abraham endured the severest trial that ever faith was put to; through patience, Jacob persecuted by his brother, left his father's house; through patience, Joseph endured and forgave the ill-treatment of his brethren; through patience, Moses, so often abused and insulted by a stiff-necked people, still entreated the Lord for them; through patience, David would not slay his implacable enemy Saul; through patience, Job endured the loss of all things. We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses, who, through the patience of Jesus Christ, "wandered about in sheep-skins." Heb. xi. 37, 38.

5. The present state of man renders the practice of this virtue absolutely necessary, if we would enjoy any happiness here or hereafter. Could we live in the world without sufferings, then were there no need of patience. But thus runs the sentence, "Cursed is the ground." Gen. iii. 17. Every man, from him that sitteth on the throne, to the man that lieth in a dungeon, must have labour and sorrow; and tribulation admits of no remedy but patience. The Christian has need of patience, for "he that endureth to the end shall be saved." Matt. x. 22. Woe unto you that have lost patience; and what shall ye do when the Lord, shall visit you? Patience is the only armour that is proof against all assaults, and he who has it well buckled on, needeth not to fear any adversary.

6. And lastly, let me set before you, in one view, the incomparable excellences and advantages of this lovely grace. Patience commends us to God, and keeps us his; patience is the guardian of faith, the preserver of peace, the cherisher of love, the teacher of humility; patience governs the flesh, strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, extinguishes envy, subdues pride; she bridles the tongue, restrains the hand, tramples on temptation, endures persecutions; patience produces unity in churches, and harmony in families; she comforts the poor, and moderates the rich; she makes us humble in prosperity, and cheerful in adversity; she teaches us to forgive those who have injured us, and to be the first in asking forgiveness of those we may have injured.

If, therefore, to be like unto God; if to be conformed to the image of Christ; if to follow the precepts of the gospel; if to write after the copy of the saints; if to render our present state comfortable and ensure our final salvation; if to enjoy the incomparable excellences and advantages of patience: if these things are desirable, let us from henceforth give ourselves to the pursuit of this virtue, let us "follow after patience."

1 Tim. vi. 11. And for this purpose let us adore and emulate the long-suffering of our God ; let us contemplate and transcribe into our practice the patience of Jesus Christ ; let us study and fulfil the precepts of the gospel ; let us look at and emulate the examples of the saints ; let us consider and alleviate the sorrows of our pilgrimage ; let us seek until we obtain the heavenly grace of patience, with all her benefits and blessings conferred on her by Jesus Christ ; into whose patience the Lord direct our hearts, until she have her perfect work in the salvation of our souls through the same ! Amen. 2 Thess. iii. 5.

CHRISTIAN HUMILITY.

Humbleness of mind.—Col. iii. 12.

THE first instance of being wise for ourselves, is to put the principal value upon that part of ourselves which is most noble and durable, our souls ; and to use our main diligence for securing their welfare. It is another branch of wisdom to make a right estimate of ourselves, compared with other beings, either above us, or of the same order with ourselves. Christian humility is the very temper to which such a thought will lead us. And that is to be our present subject.

I. Explain the nature of this temper.

The word which is here, and in several other places of the New Testament, used to express this Christian virtue, signifies in general a low apprehension or esteem ; and, from the scope of the places, though the word does not directly express so much, it must mean a low apprehension or esteem of ourselves. It stands directly opposite to pride and arrogance. Generally, the word is used in scripture in a good sense, but twice in one chapter of this epistle in a bad one ; Col. ii. 18—23 ; for a base and unworthy subjection of mind ; which shows, that there is occasion to guard against mistakes in this matter, as well as to illustrate the excellent temper designed to be expressed by it.

There may be a seeming humiliation of outward expression and behaviour, which covers a very proud heart. But Christians are called to put on “humbleness of mind.” The actings of this temper will be best discerned in a relative view, as we entertain a humble opinion of ourselves, compared either with God or with our fellow-creatures.

1. A humble apprehension of our own knowledge. 1 Cor. viii. 1. There is nothing which men are more ready to be proud of, and to think better of themselves in, beyond desert. Many would sooner bear a reflection upon their moral character, than upon their understandings. No branch of pride hath more need of a cure, though indeed none hath to support it, than conceit of our own knowledge. Job xi. 12. Now, the beginning of humility, and indeed of true wisdom, lies in moderating our conceit of our own sufficiency this way. And so it will include.

(1.) A sense of the natural imperfection of our faculties. There is indeed a dignity in our natures in comparison of the lower creation, as God hath made us intelligent beings ; but we should ever remember,

that the faculties he has given us are but finite, and limited at the best, and that many things are above them. Job xlii. 3.

(2.) An apprehension of our own fallibility, and liableness to mistake even where we may think we judge aright. When we consider the power of prejudice, our readiness to make rash and hasty judgments, the plausible colours which may be put upon error, the indisposition of our minds in our fallen state, for the admission of divine truths ; when we consider these things, we have reason, in most judgments we form, to carry this cautionary thought along with us, that it is possible we may be mistaken.

Now, humility, in this view would teach us,

Not indeed upon that account to surrender ourselves to the absolute conduct and government of other men, who are fallible as well as we. We must answer for ourselves to God in the great day ; Rom. xiv. 12 ; and therefore it can neither be a laudable, nor a safe humility, to take our religion from the dictates of any fallible men or number of men. Luke xii. 57.

But a just apprehension of our liableness to mistakes should induce us in all our searches after divine truth, to be very desirous of divine illumination and guidance ; that God, by his Spirit of truth, would "show us his ways." Ps. xxv. 4, 5. It should keep us ever open to farther light, willing to learn ; we should never behave as if our opinions were infallible, but be willing, on any proper occasion, to review our sentiments, and to allow a cool and unprejudiced consideration of what may be said against them.

(3.) A moderate apprehension of our own attainments in knowledge, when we compare them with the attainments of other men. Every good man, indeed, judgeth himself to be in the right in every particular sentiment which he maintains ; for if he was convinced that it was an error, he would give it up : and it must necessarily follow from hence, that he cannot but think those of a contrary judgment to be mistaken, as long as he judges himself in the right. Is he therefore to be puffed up above others ? No, by no means. But it is a becoming humility, in most cases, even where we think ourselves in the right, yet to believe it possible, however, that those who differ from us may be in the right ; and therefore to be willing to hear what they have to offer for their judgment. 1 Cor. viii. 2 ; xiii. 9.

(4.) A persuasion of the small value of the most exalted knowledge, without a suitable practical influence. Knowledge even of divine things, is of little valuable use but in subservience to practice. John xiii. 17.

2. Humble thoughts of our own goodness, is another branch of humbleness of mind. Not that we are required to be insensible of any thing that is truly good and valuable in us. But Christian humility includes a sense of the undeservingness of our own goodness at the hands of God, Luke xvii. 10, an apprehension of the great disparity there is between the goodness of God and the goodness of any creature. Luke xviii. 19. None is originally, absolutely, necessarily, and unchangeably good, but God only. An affecting conviction of our own sinfulness, and of the guilt contracted by it. Evangelical humility implies a sense

of our lost and miserable state by the apostasy ; so that we cannot lay claim of ourselves to the Divine mercy, and yet we can have no hope without mercy : from a lively sense of this, we are heartily willing to be beholden to the gospel-way of relief. Luke v. 31, 32. A sense of the imperfection of our goodness at the best in this world, is another branch of humility to which the gospel leads us. If we are recovered from the dominion of sin, yet without insufferable pride, we shall see reason to confess, that we daily come short of the glory of God. Ps. xix. 12. An acknowledgment, that we are principally indebted to God for whatever is good in us, is also to be comprehended ; that we principally owe to him the beginning of any good work in us, and must expect from him the perfecting of it. Phil. i. 6. 1 Cor. iv. 7 ; vi. 11 ; xv. 10. A modest apprehension of our own goodness, compared with that of other men, must enter into the Christian temper. I say not, that Christian humility will oblige us to condemn ourselves as worse than all others ; though, as we know ourselves best, it is ordinarily true, that we know more amiss in ourselves as to the number, if not the kinds of sin, than we can do in any other particular person : but it will dispose us to esteem as well at least of other people's goodness as of our own, as far as there are credible evidences of it ; in which sense the apostle exhorts. Phil. ii. 3. Humility will incline us to make all charitable allowances for their failings and defects, when we are conscious of so many of our own ; to censure them with gentleness. Rom. ii. 1, and Gal. vi. 1.

3. An humble sense of our dependence and wants.

And here, first, and principally, we are concerned to have an humble sense of our dependence on God, and our need of him ; that, in the sphere of nature we cannot subsist ourselves ; that " our times are in his hands ;" Ps. xxxi. 15 ; the time of our continuance in life, the circumstances of our lot and condition, and all the particular events that can any way concern us. Our understanding and reasonable powers continually depend on him. A slight touch of the brain may soon raze out all the traces of wisdom and knowledge, and change a wise man into a fool. If he will speak peace, who can speak trouble ? And if he will exercise us with rebukes, we are never out of his reach. He has unlimited, uncontrollable power over us, and an indisputable right to do with us as seems good in his sight. If our souls are under the power of these apprehensions, humility will teach us to live in dependence on him for every thing we need.

And, in the sphere of grace, we should have an equal sense of our constant need of his influences : that we need his mercy to pardon our sins, and help our infirmities every day : that we can perform no religious exercise well, nor discharge the duty of any relation commendably, nor acquit ourselves honorably in any trial, nor make any advances in the divine life, nor be blessings in our generation, without the light and grace of his good Spirit, is one eminent part of " walking humbly with our God." Mic. vi. 8.

But then, secondly, an humble sense of our subordinate dependence upon our fellow-creatures, and the need we have of them, is not to be omitted in the description of humility. We should consider that by the law of our creation, our condition is so ordered, that we cannot comfort

tably subsist independent of our fellow-creatures. Even those in the most advanced and easy circumstances of life need the assistance of their inferiors: yea, the plenty they enjoy could not enable them to be more at ease than the meanest, if they had not the benefit of their labours. Eccl. v. 9. Every link in the chain of society contributes to the good of the whole. 1 Cor. xii. 21, &c. This should make all sensible of their dependent state, and of their interest in the society to which they belong; and besides, those who are now in the most prosperous estate, know not how soon they may need the kind offices, the good-will of those in the lowest condition of life. This leads to a fourth branch of humility.

4. A modest apprehension of our own rank and station: and compared with the blessed God, we cannot think too low of ourselves. Isa. xl. 15. All the relations in which we stand to him, bespeak the profoundest submission due from us; as we are his creatures, his subjects, preserved by him every moment, disposed of at his pleasure, and such as must appear at his bar. The very relation of children, which bespeaks the greatest friendship on his part and freedom on ours, yet obliges to humility before him. Ps. viii. 4; cxliv. 3. Job vii. 17. Humility will teach us neither to dispute the precepts nor the providence of one who needs not our consent to give him a right to rule us.

Revelation also teaches us to consider ourselves as beneath many other invisible beings, by the state of our creation. Ps. viii. 5.

And for our fellow-creatures of the human race, we should consider them all as of the same nature with us, and therefore near akin. Acts xvii. 26. That any distinctions made by outward circumstances are, in the account of God, and in themselves, really but little things.

In such a state of our case, humility will dispose to the cheerful performance of the duties of humanity to all men, esteeming them all as our brethren, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. It will be our wisdom to turn in upon ourselves by way of reflection, and to inquire how the temper of our own spirits stands in this matter.

II. Show the special obligations which lie upon us as Christians, to cultivate an humble temper.

1. Humility is a grace of the first rank and eminence in Christianity.

(1.) It is mentioned in scripture with peculiar marks of distinction and honour. Mic. vi. 8. Pride is stigmatized as his peculiar abhorrence; but humility honoured with the fullest testimonies of his approbation. Prov. viii. 13. Ps. cxxxviii. 6. When the Son of God condescended in our nature to instruct mankind, he sets humility in the front of his beatitudes, and at the head of his excellent sermon. Matt. v. 3. The importance of it, and the rank it holds in our religion, is still more emphatically described by him in another place. Matt. xviii. 4. He that excels in humility is the greatest and the best Christian. It is a laudable ambition to aspire at this foremost rank of honour among the disciples of Christ.

(2.) The most distinguishing promises are made to it, such as mark it out for a temper eminently in the way of Divine favour. The prayers of the humble are entitled to a peculiar regard. Ps. ix. 12; x. 17. They are encouraged to expect the gracious presence of God abiding

with them. Isa. lvii. 15. James iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5. The proud shall miss of the aim they have so much at heart, self-exaltation; but the humble are in the way to the truest glory, while they seem to fly from it. Matt. xxiii. 12. He shall be high in God's estimation. God is like to put the greatest honour on such a one, by the use he makes of him; and even men are commonly more disposed to respect him.

(3.) It is in its own nature a necessary introduction to the other graces and duties of Christianity. This is not a religion calculated for the proud, but the lowly.

1.) Humility is necessary to faith. Pride and self-sufficiency were the principal reasons why Christ crucified was of old "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." 1 Cor. i. 23.

It is equally necessary to obedience. A proud, unbroken heart sets up for itself; and, at least practically, says, "Who is Lord over me?" It must, therefore, be first humbled, before the language of it will be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts ix. 6.

Without this frame we shall not value a Saviour, so as to receive him, and make use of him, as he is offered in the gospel. Luke v. 31. As long as "men think that they are rich, and increased in goods," &c. they will pay but little regard to Christ. Rev. iii. 17, 18. This was the foundation of the difference of behaviour between the pharisee and the publican. Luke xviii. 9—13.

Without an humble spirit we shall not prize the grace of the Holy Spirit, nor live in a constant dependence on his aids.

Without humility we cannot persevere in our adherence to Christ, but shall be ready to take offence when we are called to trials and exercises. But humility will go a great way to make all these things sit light.

Without this grace, we shall be indisposed to receive that assistance from other men in the way to heaven which we might obtain. Those who are wise in their own conceit, despise the admonitions of their pious parents and friends, are impatient of reproof, are above ministerial instructions; and, for want of a modest apprehension of their own defects, suppose themselves too good proficient in knowledge to learn, or in goodness to improve.

And, lastly, without this lowly disposition we cannot possibly perform that compass of duty to our fellow-creatures, which makes so great a part of true Christianity. A haughty mind will ill comport with "becoming all things to all men, that we may gain some;" with "pleasing our neighbour for his good to edification." Rom. xv. 2.

So evident is it that humility is a grace of the first rank in Christianity.

2.) It is a grace which adorns every other virtue, and recommends religion to every beholder. If all the characters mentioned in that rule of conduct, which the apostle lays down in Phil. iv. 5, can be said to meet in any one grace, it is in humility. Our light cannot more effectually shine before men, than by not affecting to have it shine, that is, by humility." Hence St. Peter calls us to "be clothed with humility." 1 Pet. v. 5. And St. Paul, in the text, to put it on, as an ornament." It casts a lustre even upon attainments comparatively low, while pride eclipses the beauty of great and distinguishing excellence.

3.) Humility is eminently recommended to us by the example of

the Author and finisher of our faith. There is hardly any one part of the amiable character of Christ, of which the gospel-history gives us more instances, than of his humbleness of mind, nor any in which he is more frequently and expressly proposed to us for a pattern.

(I.) His assuming the human nature was the highest instance of humiliation that ever was or could be given ; that "the Word, who was in the beginning with God, and was God," should consent to be made flesh. This is a very proper argument to inculcate upon us humility in our measure, and with that view is proposed to us by the apostle in Phil. ii. He had among other things exhorted to "lowliness of mind," verse 3, and adds, verse 5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." How was such a temper shown by Christ? It follows, "who being in the form of God," &c. Phil. ii. 6.

(II.) When he appeared in the world in the human nature, he affected not worldly glory and honour. He descended from a family which was then very obscure, which had lost the ancient dignity and grandeur of his father David. There were no servile attendants, no sumptuous preparations made for his nativity ; Luke ii. 7 ; but, as in his after life, so now, he had scarcely "a place where to lay his head." The shepherds could never have divined, without the instruction of an angel, that here in this manner, was "born a Saviour, which was Christ the Lord." Verses 8—11. And the wise men of the East must be under a divine conduct, to find the King of the Jews in such a despicable place. While he was growing up, he lived with his reputed father, a carpenter, and thence was styled "the carpenter's son." Matt. xiii. 55. When he entered upon his public ministry, the generality of those whom he chose for his disciples and followers were poor fishermen, or men of a like condition. He made no outward figure, and meanly sojourned in places of small note ; he submitted to the last act of his humiliation, to be "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Now, surely, all this was to recommend humility to us, to teach his disciples not to seek high things for themselves.

(III.) As man, he was a pattern of great humility towards God. He "sought not his own glory, but the glory of him that sent him." John vii. 18 ; viii. 50. This was his professed aim through his course on earth, and conspicuous in the course of his words and actions. Mark xiii. 32. Matt. xix. 17. He ascribed the glory of his works to his Father. He was entirely obedient to his commands, for what he should say and do, in the minutest circumstances, and for the hardest services.

(IV.) He was a pattern of the greatest humility to mankind. He was ready to condescend to the meanest, in order to their good. Most of the miracles he performed were wrought upon those who were of a low condition. Matt. viii. 6, &c. Mark x. 46. John iv. 27. He overlooked not even little children ; but called his followers to learn good instructions from them, and to be very tender of them. Matt. xviii. 1—10 ; xix. 13, 14.

He was willing to stoop to the meanest offices for the meanest persons ; Mark i. 41 ; and particularly recommends the greatest condescension to his disciples, by using an emblematic action for that purpose, of washing their feet. John xiii. 5, &c. Matt. xx. 28. And yet, which

was another instance of humility, he was not above receiving and acknowledging the respect shown him by the meanest. Luke viii. 3. He takes notice of the honest and well-meant hosannahs paid him by children; Matt. xxi. 15; and the more hearty mark of respect shown him by the women who poured ointment on his head. Matt. xxvi. 13.

Now, how forcible an engagement should this be to all who profess a relation to him, to imitate him in a virtue which made so great a part of the character of their Master! to "learn of him who was lowly in heart." Matt. xi. 29.

(4.) Humility is a grace which will go along with us to heaven. The only inhabitants of that world who were ever lifted up with pride, have been long ago cast down from thence to hell. The "seraphim cover their feet" in presence of the Divine Majesty, magnify him with incessant adorations, and abase themselves continually before him. Isa. vi. 2, 3. Rev. iv. 10. And to the same purpose, chap. v. 14. And, as a farther description of the humility of their adoration, they are said to "fall before the throne on their faces." Chap. vii. 11; xi. 16. God in that world is all in all; and every blessed spirit there, up to the most exalted celestial mind, maintains the sense of infinite distance, in the midst of the most familiar and satisfying approaches; and receives the bounties of the great Creator, crying, Grace, grace! We have a specimen of the humble temper attending saints to the judgment-day, in the representation of it given by our Saviour. Matt. xxv. We may say, indeed, in commendation of humility, beyond many other graces, that it is greater and more excellent than they, for the same reason that love is preferred to faith and hope, because "it never" faileth.

III. Infer,

1. Those who are destitute of this grace, whatever profession they have made of Christianity, have in truth the rudiments of it yet to learn. A proud Christian is a contradictory character; as much as it would be to say, a wicked saint.

2. We should look principally to the temper of our spirits, to judge of our humility. We may have the character of humble people with men, from a modest outside, a negligence of garb, &c. Humbleness of mind makes the Christian temper; and the poor in spirit are the heirs of the promises.

3. No single branch of goodness deserves more of our attention, in order to judge of the improving or declining state of our souls, than this of humility. If we grow in knowledge, and are puffed up along with it, we lose more in goodness than we gain in profitable furniture. This is a "dead fly that will spoil the whole box of ointment." Eccl. x. 1. Whether we advance in right knowledge of God or ourselves, it cannot fail to make us sensible of our defects, and humble in the sense of them. A man that improves in learning, sees more defects in his attainments, when he hath made a good progress, than he did at setting out; he discerns a larger field of knowledge before him, after all his advances, than he had any notion of when he first turned his thoughts that way. So it is with a lively Christian; he sees so much before him, that he "forgets the things that are behind, and reaches forth unto those that are before, still pressing towards the mark." Phil. iii. 13, 14.

LOVE TO GOD.

The Lord preserveth all them that love him.—Ps. cxlv. 20.

“**THOU** shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart.” This is what God requires of his people, and enjoins as a command to be obeyed; Deut. vi. 4, 5; x. 12; xxx. 16; and this is the chief and principal, the first and greatest command, and entirely agreeable to the law and light of nature and reason. Matt. xxii. 36—38. Hence the apostle says, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Rom. xiii. 10.

I. On what account God is to be loved, and is loved by his saints.

1. For himself; because of his own nature and the perfections of it, which render him amiable and lovely. Ps. viii. 1.—2. God is to be loved by his saints as their *summum bonum*, their chief good, yea, their only good, their ALL in ALL: and so to be only loved. Ps. lxxiii. 25.—3. God is to be loved by his people for the blessings of his goodness communicated to them. Ps. vi. 9.—4. The various relations God stands in to his people, do, and should, engage their affections to him. Ps. xviii. 1.—5. What greatly influences the love of the Lord’s people to him, and lays them under obligation to love him, is his great love to them. 1 John iv. 19.—6. The examples of the saints in all ages might be urged as motives to love the Lord.

II. How, and in what way and manner, love to God manifests itself.

1. In a desire to be like him. Eph. v. 1.—2. In making his glory the supreme end of all their actions. 1 Cor. x. 31.—3. In desiring of, and delighting in, communion with God; longing to appear before God; enjoy his presence in his courts; thirst for him as in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, that they may see his power and his glory in his sanctuary. 1 John i. 3.—4. In a carefulness not to offend him by sinning against him. Ps. xcvi. 10.—5. In parting with, and bearing all for his sake; leaving their own people and father’s house, country, and kindred, as Abraham, to go where he directs; saying, as Ruth said to Naomi, “Whither thou goest, I will go;” endure all hardships for his sake.—6. In a regard to his house, worship, and ordinances: they that love the Lord love the habitation of his house, the place where his honour dwells. Ps. lxxxiv. 1.—7. By a value for his word, his gospel, and the truths of it: they that love the Lord receive the love of the truth.—8. In love and affection to the people of God; who are, with those that love the Lord, the excellent of the earth.

III. The nature and properties of the love of God.

1. It is universal; a love of all that is in God, and belongs unto him; of all his attributes and perfections, not of his goodness, grace, and mercy, and of him for them only: but of his holiness, justice, and truth; and of all his commandments, which are to be respected. Every word of God is pure to them that love the Lord; and this love extends to all the people of God, of whatsoever class, rank, degree, or denomination. Eph. vi. 23, 24.—2. It is superlative; exceeds all other love, or love to all other persons and things.—3. It is hearty and sincere; a love without dissimulation; not in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth.—

4. Should be constant ; such is the love of God to his people, he rests in his love towards them.—5. It may be increased ; the apostle prays for an increase of it, and he thanks God for it that it did abound. 1 Thess. iii. 12 ; 2 Thess. i. 3.

IV. The happiness of such that love the Lord.

1. They are loved by him : “ I love them that love me.” Ps. lxxiii. 3.—2. They are known of God. 1 Cor. viii. 3 ; 2 Tim. ii. 19.—3. They are preserved by him. Ps. cxlv. 20 ; xxxi. 23.—4. They have many instances of mercy, kindness, and respect shown them. Ex. xx. 6. Hence David prays. Ps. cxix. 123. Prov. viii. 21.—5. All things that occur unto them in the present life are for their good. Rom. viii. 28.—6. Great things are laid up and reserved for them that love the Lord.

THE NATURE AND

EXCELLENCY OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

A good conscience.—1 Tim. i. 19.

WE consider ourselves as giving a high character of a person, when we say of him that he possesses a sound understanding, a clear and distinguishing judgment, and a faithful, retentive memory ; especially if these faculties of the mind are improved and brought into proper exercise by a long and extensive acquaintance with men and things, and by a close attention to study and books. We cannot but think highly of such a man, and conceive him entitled to great respect and deference : we are desirous, if honoured with his acquaintance, of consulting him on all occasions of importance, in which we need counsel or direction ; and are disposed to place a high degree of confidence in his judgment, and to follow his directions. But there are qualities of mind far more valuable and important than those just mentioned ; viz. a tender heart and a good conscience ; qualities these, which, though they may not be attractive or splendid in the eyes of men, are of higher estimation in the sight of God, far more conducive to our own peace and comfort in this world, and inseparable to a meetness for the next. Of one of these I propose now to discourse, viz. “ a good conscience.”

I. Let me endeavour to show what a good conscience is.

Conscience is the power or faculty of the mind by which we sit in judgment over, and pass sentence upon, our actions ; considering ourselves as creatures accountable to God for the whole of our conduct, and amenable at last to his righteous tribunal. It is God’s vicegerent in every human breast : if our actions are good, it applauds ; if they are bad, it condemns ; if they are conformable to the law and revealed will of God, they produce a secret satisfaction and pleasure in the mind ; if contrary to God’s holy law and will, they are productive of disquietude and distress.

This faithful monitor the great Creator has stationed in every human breast. It is not peculiar to those who are favoured with the gospel

revelation, but is resident in the minds of those who have not the written law. Rom. ii. 14—16. And when this inward witness faithfully discharges its office in the soul, it soon, it immediately, testifies to us the nature of our actions. We need not, in most cases, wait long, nor consult books nor friends, before we can decide upon them; conscience immediately settles the point, and tells us whether they are right or wrong.

Conscience is the same in our souls, with regard to salvation, as the senses are in our bodies, with regard to health and life. The office of our senses is to inform us, by the short method of sensation, of whatsoever may be hurtful or beneficial to our bodies. If, when any exterior body approached us, we were always obliged to measure its size, to examine its configuration, to judge by the laws of motion, action, and reaction, whether its approach would be hurtful or beneficial to us, our frail machine would be crushed to atoms before we could finish the discussion. If it were necessary always, before we took any nourishment, to examine the nature of the aliments set before us, to understand the properties and effects of them, we should die with hunger before we had finished our researches. God has enabled the senses in our bodies to supply the place of tedious discussion. This beautiful economy is never disconcerted, except when our bodies are disordered. It is exactly the same with regard to conscience. If always when it was necessary to examine the morality of an action, we were obliged to turn over a large class of books, to consult our casuists, and to examine a whole system of rectitude, what would become of us! The short way of sentiment supplies the place of all this discussion. A sudden horror, excited by the idea of a vice we are going to practise, is, in urgent cases, books and casuists to us. When we lose this moral sensation we lose our best guide, and are then exposed to an infallible misery of proceeding from one error to another; from a first pernicious practice to a second, and so, in the end, to a gulf of final wretchedness.

Having made these observations on the nature of conscience in general, we proceed now to show what a good conscience is.

1. In order to a conscience being good, in the scriptural sense of the term, it must be pacified by the blood of Christ. There is a wide difference between that insensibility and stupor of soul experienced by impenitent sinners, and that calm and peaceful state of mind which it is the privilege of the believer to enjoy, in consequence of his faith in the blood of the Saviour for pardon and justification. In the one case conscience is asleep, and does not discharge its office in the soul; in the other it is awake and active, but is pacified through the atoning blood of the Saviour. This peace of conscience is the natural result of faith in the Almighty Saviour, which brings the soul into a state of peace with God, Rom. v. 1, and there is good foundation laid for peace of conscience. Rom. viii. 33, 34.

2. In order to a conscience being good it must also be purified. Sin defiles the conscience; indeed it contaminates all the powers and faculties of the soul. We read of conscience being defiled. Titus i. 15. While in such a state it must be an evil conscience. In order to its becoming good it must be purified. Of this purgation of conscience we read, Heb. ix. 14; x. 21, 22.

3. A good conscience is a tender conscience. It is the distinguishing characteristic, and a dreadful one indeed it is, of some men, that they have a hard heart and a seared conscience. A more dreadful character and situation than this cannot easily be found on this side hell. In opposition to this awful character is a good conscience. The possessor of it is afraid of transgressing, and is desirous of shunning even the appearance of evil. He dares not presume to stand even on the borders of iniquity.

4. A good conscience is a vigilant or wakeful conscience. The conscience of some persons is asleep, so that it cannot discharge its office in the soul. Its proper office in the soul is like that of a watchman, to give the alarm when the thief or plunderer approaches to injure or annoy the inhabitants of a house. If the watchman be asleep, the thief, or the enemy, finds easy access; so, if conscience be asleep, sin, which is our greatest enemy, finds an easy access into the heart. But if conscience be awake, it will sound the alarm, so that sin cannot enter without all the faculties of the mind being in motion to resist and oppose it. Conscience immediately upon the approach of temptation, faithfully remonstrates with the soul, and says, "Do not this evil, and sin against God." Gen. xxxix. 9.

5. A good conscience is a well-regulated, or well-directed conscience. By this I mean, that it should not be over scrupulous beyond what the law or word of God requires: because when this is the case, it degenerates into weakness of mind, and engenders superstition and bondage. Thus we read, 1 Cor. viii. 7—10. It will enable a man to "stand fast in the liberty," (Gal. v. 1.) It can clearly and readily discern between the precepts and injunctions of the law and gospel of Christ, and the ordinances and institutions of men. Ps. cxix. 34.

II. Endeavour to point out a few of the advantages arising from the possession of a good conscience.

1. It is an excellent and effectual preservative from sin. Who are they that rush on boldly in the paths of sin, and commit iniquity with greediness? They whose consciences are asleep, or seared; as we read is the awful case of some persons, 1 Tim. iv. 2. But they whose consciences are tender and vigilant, cannot thus boldly rush into the paths of iniquity: they will ever be afraid of transgressing: and as it will be a good preservative from profaneness on the one hand, so it will from superstition on the other.

2. A good conscience will be productive of great satisfaction and joy, at all times, and in all circumstances. 2 Cor. i. 12. Happy they who can solemnly make such a declaration as this respecting themselves! The world often censures where it ought to approve: it often condemns where it ought to applaud. What a mercy, under such circumstances, to have a good conscience! This will keep the mind calm and serene under the most gross calumnies and the severest censures. And if a good conscience be of such importance, as a defence against the censures of this world, of what importance will it be to compose and cheer the mind, in the near and immediate prospect of an eternal world! What an unspeakable mercy will it be then, to possess a conscience pacified by the blood of Jesus!

III. Improve the subject.

1. Inquire whether you are possessors of such a conscience. I do not mean to ask you, whether you can recollect but few or many crimes, but whether your consciences are purged from the guilt of them; whether they are purified and pacified by the blood of Jesus? Such a conscience is worth all the world, yea, ten thousand worlds are not to be placed in competition with it.

2. Reflect for a moment, if you are destitute of it, on your awful state. Conscience may now be asleep, but it is very likely it will by and by awake, and perhaps cause you to shudder with horror at the remembrance of past iniquities, and the prospect of that gulf of misery into which they are about to plunge you. Should it, on your dying bed, present to your view a long catalogue of black crimes, which you, perhaps, had forgotten, and not one of which you have any reason to hope is forgiven, how inconceivably awful will your situation be! It will be a dreadful anticipation of the torments of the damned. This, surely, is that worm that dieth not: this is that fire which shall never be quenched. Cry then earnestly to God, and say, Lord, let my heart be "sprinkled from an evil conscience!" Heb. x. 22.

CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE.

Add to your faith, virtue.—2 Peter i. 5.

THE apostle supposes those to whom he wrote to have obtained like precious faith with him and the other apostles, ver. 1, *i. e.* to believe the gospel, as well as they. He proceeds to exhort them to give all diligence in building a proper superstructure upon the belief of the gospel. That which he recommends consists of seven important articles. The first mentioned, and which he immediately connects with faith, is virtue. "Giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue."

Some would understand virtue in a general sense for an universal regularity of mind and manners, or a disposition to all virtuous actions. I take the word virtue in a more limited sense here, to mean the particular disposition of Christian fortitude. What could more naturally be pressed upon us after faith, or a belief of the gospel, than courage in the profession of it, and in a practice correspondent to it? And what could more aptly follow upon this, than that we should add to our virtue, or courage, knowledge? or a growing acquaintance with the doctrines and duties contained in the rule of our faith, that our courage and resolution may not be ill-placed?

I. Explain the nature of Christian courage, or fortitude.

Courage, in general, is a temper which disposes a man to do brave and commendable actions, without being daunted at the appearance of dangers and difficulties in the way. The Christian life being a warfare, gives the principal occasion and opportunity to show Christian courage. It is nothing else but to behave as "good soldiers of Jesus Christ." 2 Tim. ii. 3.

To explain it more particularly, it may be proper to show,

1. For what it is to be exercised. For the cause makes it a Christian

grace. It is courage in Christ's cause : that is, in maintaining the profession of the Christian faith, and adhering to the practice of our duty, as far as we are convinced of the mind of God. 1 Tim. i. 18, 19.

But it must necessarily be presupposed, that we are careful to inform ourselves well about the mind and will of God, relating both to faith and practice, that our courage may not be blind and rash, without a good foundation to support it.

And indeed, without such diligent inquiries, we are hardly like to be courageous in an hour of trial, whatsoever resolution we may seem to have, while difficulties are at a distance.

2. Against what, Christian courage is to be exercised. It supposes oppositions, trials, and dangers in our way ; else there would be no occasion for it. It is a temper, for which there will be no room in heaven ; and the need of it now ariseth from our present condition, as in a state of conflict.

(1.) The power, the subtilty, and activity of the powers of darkness, call for courage in a Christian. Upon this the apostle founds an exhortation to be strong, or courageous. Eph. vi. 10, 12.

(2.) The oppositions from within ourselves require courage. Our own irregular inclinations, affections, and passions are difficult to be overcome.

(3.) The several discouragements or dangers we may meet with from other men, in the way of our duty, and even for our duty, make courage necessary. Solomon tells us, "that the fear of man bringeth a snare." Prov. xxix. 25. Courage is to overcome this snare. Acts xx. 24.

3. Wherein, or in what acts and instances it should express itself.

Insensibleness of difficulties or dangers is not a proper expression of it. It is not expected of a Christian that his apprehension of these things should be less quick than other people's, or that he should have no natural reluctance to them. Without that, there would be no trial of his courage. Nor are we to expose ourselves unnecessarily to dangers. We should exercise courage in conjunction with Christian prudence, though it ought not to be under the restraints of carnal policy. It would rather be imprudence than duty, to act, in time of persecution, as some primitive Christians did, who ran uncalled to the heathen tribunals, and cried, "I am a Christian !" on purpose that they might obtain the honour and reward of martyrdom. It is delivered as an ordinary rule by Christ himself to his disciples, when he foretells the persecutions that would await them. Matt. x. 23. Though circumstances may sometimes vary the case, and make even this inconsistent with duty. Nehemiah was so situated. Neh. vi. 11. Christian courage is to exert itself in such ways as these :

(1.) In deliberate and vigorous resolutions for God and our duty, upon counting the cost. This is all that can be done, when difficulties and dangers are not actually present ; seriously to consider them, and, upon balancing matters, to determine for a firm adherence to our Master, whatever it may cost us. Luke xiv. 26—30. The same thing Barnabas inculcated upon the church of Antioch. Acts xi. 23. Such a noble ardour in Paul was a bright part of his character. Acts xxi. 13.

(2.) In the suppression of distracting fear of evils at a distance. The

coward often fears where no fear is ; and, as well as the slothful man creates to himself many imaginary dangers. Prov. xxii. 13. The brave soldier of Christ does not anxiously take thought about the morrow, but leaves future events to God's ordering. Ps. cxii. 7, 8.

(3.) In a vigorous application to our Christian work, notwithstanding the stated and constant difficulties and oppositions attending it. Though Satan would hinder, and the world ensnare, and a corrupt heart resist, a courageous Christian goes on as one resolved to conquer or die ; striving to enter in at the strait gate. Luke xiii. 24. Matt. xi. 12.

(4.) In readiness to undertake hard and difficult services, when God calls to them. Such as may be eminently for the honour of God or the advantage of our generation, though we may foresee few to help us. Ps. xciv. 16. Or when duty obliges us to go upon an ungrateful errand. Isa. vi. 8. And especially when visible dangers await us, not to decline a service of which we are capable. Heb. xi. 27.

(5.) In an uniform steadiness of conduct under all the trials we actually meet with. It is no great expression of courage in common life, to talk big when dangers are remote ; but should a man meet suffering with a trembling heart, yet, if he stands his ground in the hour of temptation, he has the truest courage. As it has been observed of some of the bravest soldiers, they have come with a trembling hand into the battle, but when once engaged have done wonders.

II. What may be intended in the exhortation to add virtue, or courage, to our faith.

This may intimate the imperfection of our faith, without this superstructure upon it. It is necessary to be added to our faith, in order to our acceptance with God. Rom. x. 9. Faith is dead, if it produce not a correspondent profession and course of action.

But that which I principally apprehend to be designed is, to intimate the just reason which our faith gives for Christian courage. Christian faith is most fit to inspire with Christian fortitude. For instance,

1. Faith discovers Divine Providence as engaged for us, and with us, in all our difficulties. God frequently animated his servants, under the Old Testament, in hard services, by an assurance of his presence : Gen. xxvi. 24. Isa. xli. 10. Dan. iii. 17 : like the Jewish nurses in Egypt, who were not afraid of the king's commandment. Faith will support us, in the greatest dangers, by this reasoning, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Heb. xiii. 5, 6. 1 John iv. 4.

2. Faith proposes the Divine Spirit, as directly provided to help our infirmities. Particularly for this very purpose, to inspire us with needful courage. Eph. iii. 16. Agreeable to that ancient promise, Ps. xxvii. 14.

3. Faith represents our main enemies as already vanquished, and as having their chief power broken. The Captain of our salvation hath personally overcome them, and as the head of his church, too. Col. ii. 15. John xvi. 33. Hence the intention of God in sending his Son, is represented to be, "that we should be saved from our enemies." Luke i. 71, and verses 74, 75.

4. Faith gives us particular assurance, that our trials shall not exceed our strength ; either the strength we have, or that which shall be imparted. 1 Cor. x. 13.

5. Faith sets in view greater evils to be feared from our cowardice, than can be feared from our adherence to God. Christ elegantly sets these the one over against the other. Luke xii. 4, 5. Heb. x. 38, 39. And the fearful, who choose always to be in the rear in danger, stand in the front of those who "shall have their part in the second death." Rev. xxi. 8. One would think this necessity, and the impossibility of escaping without it, should make even a coward to fight.

6. Faith assures us of the certain and glorious success of our courage. That our endeavours against our powerful enemies shall issue in a full conquest. Rom. xvi. 20. And though now a saint, after all his struggles, may have frequent occasion to mourn over the body of death, he may be assured that God "will deliver him from it, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom. vii. 24, 25. "And death itself, the last enemy, shall be destroyed." 1 Cor. xv. 26. And unspeakable rewards shall be the prize of the conquerors. We strive for mastery, not as uncertain what we are to obtain by it, but for an incorruptible crown. 1 Cor. ix. 25, 26; xv. 58.

7. Faith represents to us the noblest examples of such holy fortitude upon the same principle: all the excellent of the earth, particularly that noble collection of worthies, whose brave exploits are recorded in Heb. xi. The glorious apostle Paul himself: and, above all, the Captain of our salvation, who was the illustrious pattern of invincible courage in his work; he feared the face of no man in the course of his ministry, but boldly reprov'd sin and sinners. His enemies could not help owning it. Matt. xxii. 16. John vii. 25, 26. "Consider him, that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Heb. xii. 2, 3.

Upon the whole.

1. Consider this grace of fortitude as a matter of the utmost importance in the Christian life. The variety of oppositions and difficulties in our way make it necessary. We shall never make any considerable progress in the divine life without it, nor ever do much for God or our generation. 2 Tim. i. 7.

2. Cultivate therefore your faith, in order to the forming of your minds to holy fortitude. Frequently contemplate the establishing motives of the gospel, which are so full and apposite; and by prayer and frequent reviews of the grounds of your faith, endeavour to confirm your hope in the gospel.

3. Use all farther additional means to fortify your minds. Be prepared for the worst, by counting frequently the cost. Make clear the goodness of your case, for which you may be called to exert your courage. Make sure of the goodness of your state, and carefully exercise a good conscience.

CHRISTIAN MEEKNESS.

Put on—meekness.—Col. iii. 12.

IN the consideration of this grace, I shall proceed,

I. To explain the nature of Christian meekness.

1. It may be considered in relation to God. There is a meekness which becomes us towards him; and there are two remarkable instances of it.

(1.) A full and ready submission of soul to the authority of his word, so as not to suffer any prepossessions of sentiment, or former inclinations, to rise up against the significations of his will, as soon as that is made known to us. This I understand by the character of the meek, in Ps. xxv. 9; and in that prophecy of Christ, Isa. lxi. 1; and by the temper with which St. James directs us to receive the word of God. James i. 21. In all which places meekness signifies not only a sedate composure of mind, free from ruffle and hurry, but also a teachable, tractable temper.

This sort of meekness is a necessary qualification for the obedience of faith, and for the success and efficacy of God's word upon us. We should be of Samuel's temper. 1 Sam. iii. 9. He is not meek towards God, who is not content to believe what he plainly reveals. Acts x. 33.

(2.) A cheerful and absolute resignation to his providence, is another branch of meekness towards God; in opposition to fretfulness and murmuring. Ps. xxxix. 9. When we have humbly prayed for any temporal good, if he sees meet to deny it, as soon as his pleasure is known by the event, we should behave like David upon the death of his son. 2 Sam. xii. 22, 23.

2. The scriptures lead us principally and most frequently to consider meekness in relation to other men. The meek are such as exercise themselves in a careful restraint and regulation of their passions, reducing them within the bounds of reason and religion. It consists and expresses itself,

(1.) In a calmness of temper, and behaviour thereupon, under provocations. This is its most direct and eminent province. The meek will not take offence hastily, and without just reason; but be very careful, that they "be not angry without a cause." Matt. v. 22. This is included in the exhortation to "be slow to wrath," James i. 19; and in those properties of charity, 1 Cor. xiii. 5—7.

Meekness will make us careful not to "render railing for railing;" but rather if possible, to break the force of other people's unreasonable anger by gentle returns. Prov. xv. 1. We should gladly try to win with kindness a man that hath injured us; to "overcome evil with good." Rom. xii. 21.

Meekness will make us slow in using rough methods to right ourselves, even from considerable injuries, which we ought not to sit down easy under; it will dispose us to try the mildest ways first, to bring people, if possible, by them to reason; to try argument before punishment, and conference before law, and private admonition before we make a public example.

It will always keep us in a readiness to be reconciled, when an offence is acknowledged, and reasonable satisfaction offered. The gospel teaches us to be rarely and hardly provoked, but to be quickly and easily pacified: "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools." Eph. iv. 26. Implacableness is evidently the reverse of the Christian temper. When

Peter asked Christ, "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" Christ makes him this return, "I say unto thee, until seven times;" not only so far, "but until seventy times seven." Matt. xviii. 21, 22.

(2.) Meekness should express itself in a care to avoid giving offence to others; and a modesty of behaviour for that purpose towards all. St. Paul directs Titus to recommend meekness in this sense to Christians. Titus iii. 2. As "charity," so meekness "is kind, and doth not behave itself unseemly." 1 Cor. xiii. 4, 5.

(3.) Meekness is shown in a modest comporting of ourselves to our station and circumstances. It will dispose those who are in any station of inferiority contentedly to submit to the duties of that station. It will incline children to "obey their parents in all things, because this is well pleasing to the Lord;" Col. iii. 20; and servants to "be obedient to them that are their masters;" Eph. vi. 5—7; or, as it is expressed in another place, "to please them well in all things, not answering again." Titus ii. 9. It will have like influence upon subjects. Rom. xiii. 5. And we find "the ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit" particularly recommended to wives. 1 Peter iii. 4.

On the other hand, the same excellent temper will form persons in superior relations, or under smiling providences, to a lowly and condescending behaviour. Eph. vi. 4. Col. iii. 19. Eph. vi. 9. These are precepts of meekness to those in superior relations; and the same should appear in superiority of rank or circumstances.

(4.) Meekness is particularly to be expressed by a temperate and calm behaviour in matters of religion. James i. 20. Men who pretend to knowledge in religion beyond their neighbours, will confute their own pretensions if they have not learned this lesson of it. James iii. 13. We have no other method prescribed or allowed by the gospel, even to those who most obstinately oppose it, but "meekness." 2 Tim. ii. 25. 1 Pet. iii. 15. The same spirit and temper are to be carried into Christian societies themselves, and offenders against the law of Christ are to be treated, and their recovery endeavoured, "in the spirit of meekness."

II. Show our obligations, as Christians, to the exercise of this grace.

1. It is a frequent precept of the gospel. This plainly appears from many passages already mentioned, in giving an account of its nature, and might be made more evident from others. It is pressed upon us, as an eminent branch of that walk which becomes our Christian calling. Eph. iv. 1, 2.

2. It is represented as essential to a true Christian, as much as any other particular grace or virtue: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his;" Rom. viii. 9; and if we have the Spirit, we have his fruits in us: now, this is one of his necessary fruits; the greatest part of Gal. v. 22, 23, are either branches of meekness, or very nearly allied to it. The apostle represents meekness, as a necessary branch of the new man, and recommends it as such in the text. The necessity of it will appear from Matt. v. 22.

3. Meekness hath particular characters of honour put upon it in the gospel. It is a principal ornament, 1 Pet. iii. 4, a temper with which God is highly pleased; and no wonder, since "he that is slow to anger

is better than the mighty." Prov. xvi. 32. He is the most glorious conqueror who has obtained a victory over himself. A peculiar blessedness is pronounced upon such, Matt. v. 5. They may confidently rely upon God as their protector and avenger. Ps. lxxvi. 9.

4. We have Christ's example here to recommend and enforce the exercise of meekness; this was a bright part of his character. Matt. xi. 29. Hence St. Paul beseeches Christians, "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ," as known and conspicuous branches of his character; 2 Cor. x. 1; and so they certainly were. John x. 31, 32. Matt. xxvi. 50. Luke xxii. 48. Matt. xxvi. 62, 63. Isa. liii. 7. Luke xxiii. 34.

III. By way of reflection.

1. Be persuaded to "seek meekness." Zeph. ii. 3. Propose it to yourselves as a matter of necessity.

To this end, it will be of great moment that a careful guard be kept upon our hearts, and that the beginnings of anger there be observed. Let us often seek meekness of God by prayer; let us pray for the Spirit, one of whose fruits it is.

2. See that your meekness be indeed a Christian grace. To make it so, it must be animated by Christian principles, and exercised by the direction of the Christian rule.

3. Let us not lay much stress upon an excuse commonly made for other faults, that they were done in a passion. A true Christian will rather consider those evil effects of his passion as aggravations of the sinfulness of it, and be more watchful for the future, and diligent to grow in meekness; which will be a growing preparation for the heavenly world, where neither pride nor passion have any place; but all is calm and serene, peaceful and happy.

SPIRITUAL JOY.

Rejoice in the Lord alway.—Phil. iv. 4.

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit; it enters very much into the Christian's character and experience, and is peculiar to saints and believers in Christ.

I. The objects of it.

1. Not a creature, nor creature-enjoyment, nor outward privilege, nor duty; but Jehovah himself, the Lord and God of all. Ps. xliii. 4. To rejoice in God is what is exhorted to, both in the Old and New Testament. So the prophet Habakkuk did, and resolved to do, in the worst of times; Hab. iii. 17, 18; not in him merely as the Creator, from whom are derived being, life, and breath, and all things, which yet is matter of joy; nor in him merely as the God of providence; but more especially saints rejoice in him as their covenant God. Isa. lxi. 10. And particularly,

1. In the attributes of God, which are all on the side of his people, and are exercised for their good, and they receive benefit and advantage from; and not only his power, wisdom, truth, and faithfulness, his

goodness, grace, mercy, are matter of joy, but even his justice and holiness. Ps. xcvi. 12.—2. The covenant of grace God has made with his chosen in Christ, yields abundance of joy to the believer, both in life and in death. 2 Sam. xxii. 5.—3. Christ and things relating to him are the objects of the spiritual joy of saints: this enters into the very character of true Christians and believers in Christ, who are described as such who “rejoice in Christ.” Phil. iii. 3; 1 Pet. i. 8. The things relating to him, which are matter and ground of joy, are such as relate both to his person and his work.

First, That relate to his person. Heb. i. 3. As, 1. The greatness of his person, who thought it no robbery to be equal with God: his righteousness is the righteousness of God; his blood the blood of the Son of God, and as such, has a virtue to cleanse from all sin; his sacrifice the sacrifice of himself, and so of a sweet-smelling savour to God, and of efficacy to atone for sin; and his salvation a great salvation, plenteous and complete; he is able to keep them from falling, and to save to the uttermost.—2. The fitness of his person; having taken the human nature into union with his Divine person, he is very proper to be the Mediator between God and man; to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, which is great joy unto them.—3. The fulness of his person: both the fulness of the Godhead, which dwells in him, and the fulness of grace which it has pleased the Father should dwell in him. Isa. xii. 3. Col. i. 19.

Secondly. There are other things which relate to the work of Christ, which are matter of joy to gracious souls.

1. Salvation in general: this is the work Christ was appointed to, which was given him. The church is called upon to rejoice in a view of his coming to effect it; Zech. ix. 9; and both Old and New Testament saints have rejoiced in it, in a view of its certain accomplishment, of its fulness and suitableness to them, and the glory of God displayed in it; Ps. xx. 7: and in such a frame of soul was Mary, the mother of our Lord, when she said, “My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour:” and great reason there is for the exercise of spiritual joy on this account, since it is a salvation of the souls of men: it is for sinners, for the chief of sinners; it is a salvation from sin. This salvation is entirely free; it is by grace, and not of works. Isa. xlv. 22. It is a salvation plenteous and complete; it is eternal; it is exceedingly suitable to the case and circumstances of sinners, and makes for the glory of God.

2. A branch of Christ's work in particular, which he had to work, and has wrought out, is everlasting righteousness; and such who are made to see their need of it, and are enabled to lay hold on it, rejoice in it, as the church did. Isa. lxi. 10. And there are many things respecting this righteousness which are matter and ground of joy to a believing soul. It is the righteousness of God which is revealed from faith to faith in the gospel, and has a sufficient virtue in it to justify all the Lord's people, “all the seed of Israel.” Isa. xlv. 25. It is satisfactory to the law and justice of God: it is commensurate to all the demands of the law; wherefore, the Lord's people are presented by Christ unto his Father, “unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight.” Col. i. 22. It acquits and absolves from all sin; by it those who believe in

Christ are "justified from all things." It renders acceptable in the sight of God; such as have on the righteousness of Christ are accepted in the Beloved. This righteousness of Christ is entirely free: it was freely wrought out by Christ, and is freely imputed to men. Rom. iii. 24. It affords much peace and comfort to those who see their interest in it. This work of righteousness is peace. This righteousness is an everlasting one: it always continues to justify, and to be a constant ground of peace and joy. It entitles to eternal life. Tit. iii. 7.

3. Another part of Christ's work, and a very principal one, was to make atonement for sin. This was the work appointed for him in council and covenant, and declared in prophecy; Dan. ix. 24; and for this purpose he became man; Heb. ii. 17; and by that one sacrifice he has made perfect expiation for the sins of his people, and which is matter of exceeding great joy unto them. Rom. v. 10, 11.

Thirdly. Besides the person and work of Christ, there are other things either antecedent to it, or consequent on it, which are matter of joy to believers in him.

1. His incarnation. Luke ii. 10, 11. The sufferings and death of Christ, by which he accomplished the work of redemption and salvation: for, though they were painful to Christ, and in some respects occasion mourning to saints, whose sins were the cause of them, yet they make up a part of the gospel of salvation. Gal. vi. 14. The resurrection of Christ from the dead, after he had finished his work, is another source and spring of joy. Luke xxiv. 34. John xx. 20. The ascension of Christ to heaven, and his exaltation there, give joy to his saints. The intercession of Christ, as appearing in the presence of God for his people, is matter of great joy.

2. The ministration of the gospel is matter of joy to all sensible and awakened sinners. When Christ was preaching in Samaria, there was great joy in that city. The administration of ordinances, which give such views of Christ in his sufferings and death, &c. yield delight to believing souls. The prosperity of the interest of Christ, whether it be through the numerous conversions of men, and additions of them to the church, gives joy; Acts xv. 3; or whether through peace, love, and unity prevailing and subsisting among the saints. Ps. cxxii. 6—9.

3. The heavenly joy and happiness of a future state to all eternity, is the object of the saints' present joy: when they shall actually possess it, they will then "enter into the joy of their Lord." See Matt. xxv. 10.

II. The author and cause of this spiritual joy.—1. The efficient cause is God; he who is the object is the Author of it, God, Father, Son, and Spirit; and which is therefore called "the joy of the Lord;" Neh. viii. 10; Rom. xv. 13; who is God the Father. Christ himself is the Author of this joy; and he calls it "my joy." John xv. 11. Isa. lxi. 3. And the Spirit of God is concerned in it; it is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and is ranked with the first of them, Gal. v. 22, and is called "joy in the Holy Ghost," because produced by him. Rom. xiv. 17.—2. The instruments or means of it are the ministers of the gospel through the ministration of the word and administration of ordinances; they are the bringers of good tidings of good, the publishers of peace and salvation, and the means of spreading much joy among the saints.

Isa. lii. 7. They do not pretend to have dominion over the faith of believers, but to be helpers of their joy.

III. The properties of this joy.—1. It should be constant ; 1 Thess. v. 16. Phil. iv. 4 ; and there is great encouragement from the Lord always to rejoice in him ; and the character of the saints and people of God in this present state of things is, “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” 2 Cor. vi. 10 ; yea, the apostle James exhorts believers, James i. 2, 3.—Yet, 2. It is progressive. Isa. xxix. 19.—3. It is a joy that is unknown to the men of the world ; a stranger, one that is a stranger to God and godliness, intermeddles not with it, Prov. xiv. 10, has no experience of it.—4. It is unspeakable ; not to be fully expressed by those who experience it ; it is full of glory, being concerned with eternal glory and happiness. Rom. v. 2. It is a joy that cannot be taken away : “your joy no man taketh from you,” John xvi. 22.

THE

BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE THAT MOURN.

Blessed are they that mourn.—Matt. v. 4.

HERE, ver. 3—10, are eight steps leading to true blessedness : they may be compared to Jacob's ladder, the top whereof reached to heaven. We must go through the valley of tears to paradise. Mourning were a sad and unpleasant subject to treat on, were it not that it hath blessedness going before, and comfort coming after ; mourning is put here for repentance : it implies both sorrow, which is the cloud ; and tears which are the rain distilling in this golden shower. God comes down to us. The words fall into two parts :—1. An assertion, that mourners are blessed persons.—2. A reason, because they shall be comforted. I begin with the first, the assertion, mourners are blessed persons. “Blessed are ye that weep now,” Luke vi. 21. Though the saints' tears are bitter tears, yet they are blessed tears. All mourning does not entitle a man to blessedness. There is a carnal mourning, when we lament outward losses. There are abundance of these tears shed ; we have many can weep over a dead child, that cannot mourn over a crucified Saviour : worldly sorrows hasten our funerals. 2 Cor. vii. 10.

There is a diabolical mourning, and that is twofold. When a man mourns that he cannot satisfy his impure lust : this is like the devil, whose great torture is, that he cannot be more wicked. 2 Sam. xiii. 2. 1 Kings xxi. 4.

When men are sorry for the good that they have done : Pharaoh grieved that he had let the children of Israel go. Ex. xiv. 5. If we repent of the good which is past, God will not repent of the evil which is to come.

I. The object of holy mourning. There are two objects of spiritual mourning, sin and misery.

Sin. Our own sin ; sin must have tears : while we carry the fire of sin about us, we must carry the water of tears to quench it. Ezek. vii.

16. Indeed, good reason we mourn for sin, if we consider, (1.) The guilt of sin, which binds over to wrath: will not a guilty person weep, who is to be bound over to the sessions? Every sinner is to be tried for his life, and is sure to be cast, if mercy doth not become an advocate for him.—(2.) The pollution of sin: sin is a plague-spot, and wilt thou not labour to wash away this spot with thy tears? But every mourning for sin is not sufficient to entitle a man to blessedness: that mourning which will entitle a man to blessedness,

1. Is spontaneous and free; it must come as water out of a spring, not as fire out of a flint. Tears for sin must be like myrrh, which drops from the tree freely, without cutting or forcing. Mary Magdalen's repentance was voluntary: "she stood weeping," Luke vii. 38.

2. Gospel-mourning is spiritual; that is, when we mourn more for sin than suffering. Pharaoh saith, "Take away the plague;" he never thought of the plague of his heart. A sinner mourns because judgment follows at the heel of sin; but David cries out, "My sin is ever before me," Ps. li. David doth not say, the sword is ever before me, but my sin is ever before me. "I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee," Luke xv. 21. He doth not say, I am almost starved among the husks; but, I have offended my Father.

3. Gospel-mourning sends the soul to God. When the prodigal son repented, he went to his father. Luke xv. 18. Jacob wept and prayed. Hos. xii. 4. The people of Israel "wept and offered sacrifice." Judges ii. 4, 5. Absalom could not rest "till he had seen the king's face." 2 Sam. xiv. 32, 33.

4. Gospel-mourning is for sin in particular: it is with a true penitent as it is with a wounded man, he comes to the surgeon, and shows him all his wounds. "I have done this evil." Judg. x. 10; Ps. li. 4.

5. Gospel-tears must drop from the eye of faith. Mark ix. 24. The soul will be swallowed up of sorrow; it will be drowned in tears, if faith be not the bladder to keep it from sinking; though our tears drop to the earth, our faith must reach heaven. Ps. lvi. 8.

6. Gospel-mourning is mixed with self-loathing; the sinner doth admire himself, the penitent doth loathe himself. Ezek. xx. 43. He that is fallen in the dirt loathes himself. Hos. xiv. 1.

7. Gospel-mourning must be purifying; our tears must make us more holy; we must so weep for sin, as to weep out sin: our tears must drown our sins: we must not only mourn, but turn. "Turn to me with weeping." Joel ii. 12. True mourning is like the water of jealousy; it makes the thigh of sin to rot. Num. v. 12, &c.

8. Gospel-mourning must be joined with hatred of sin. 2 Cor. vii. 11.

What indignation! We must not only abstain from sin, but abhor sin; the dove hates the least feather of the hawk. The war between him and sin, is like the war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. 1 Kings xiv. 30.

9. Gospel-mourning, in some cases, is joined with restitution. Thus Zaccheus. Luke xix. 8. Ex. xxii. 1. St. James bids us not only look to the heart, but the hand. James iv. 8. If thou hast wronged another, cleanse thy hands by restitution; be assured, without restitution no remission.

10. Gospel-mourning must be a speedy mourning: we must take heed of adjourning our repentance, and putting it off till death. As David said, Ps. cxvi. 18, so should a Christian say, "I will mourn for sin now." Acts xvii. 30. Cæsar's deferring to read his letter before he went to the senate-house cost him his life. The true mourner makes haste to meet an angry God, as Jacob did his brother; and the present he sends before is the sacrifice of tears.

11. Gospel-mourning for sin is constant. There are some who, at a sermon, will shed a few tears, but this land-flood is soon dried up. As Paul said, "I die daily;" 1 Cor. xv. 31; so should a Christian say, "I mourn daily;" therefore keep open an issue of godly sorrow, and be sure it be not stopped till death. "Let not the apple of thine eye cease." Lam. ii. 18. A ship that is always leaking must have the water continually pumped out: while the soul leaks by sin we must be still pumping at the leak by repentance.

12. As we must mourn for our own sins, so we must lay to heart the sins of others. Mark iii. 5. Ps. cxix. 136. 2 Pet. ii. 7. Lot took the sins of Sodom, and made spears of them to pierce his own soul. We must mourn for the sufferings of the church. Ps. cxxxvii. 1, 2, 4.

II. Their blessedness: "They shall be comforted."

Having already presented to your view the dark side of the text, I shall now show you the light side: "They shall be comforted."

Where observe, 1. Mourning goes before comfort, as the lancing of a wound precedes the cure. If ever we have true comfort, we must have it in God's way and method. Sorrow for sin ushers in joy: "I will restore comfort to him and to his mourners." We may as well expect a crop without seed, as comfort without gospel-mourning.

2. Observe, that God keeps his best wine till last: first he prescribes mourning for sin, and then sets abroad the wine of consolation. The devil doth quite contrary; he shows the best first, and keeps the worst till last: first he shows the wine sparkling in the glass, then comes the "biting of the serpent." Prov. xxiii. 32. He showed Judas first the silver bait, and then struck him with the hook: this is the reason why sin hath so many followers, because it shows the best first; the golden crowns, then come the lion's teeth. Rev. ix. 7, 8. But God shows the worst first: he prescribes a bitter potion, and then brings a cordial: "They shall be comforted."

3. Observe, gospel-tears are not lost, they are seeds of comfort; while the penitent doth pour out tears, God pours in joy. "If thou wouldst be cheerful," saith Chrysostom, "be sad." Ps. cxxvi. 5. It was the end of Christ's anointing and coming into the world, that he might comfort them that mourn. Isa. lxi. 3. Christ had the oil of gladness poured on him, that he might pour it on the mourner; well, then, may the apostle call it "a repentance not to be repented of:" it is the inlet of joy. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Here is sweet fruit from a bitter stock. Christ caused the earthen vessels to be filled with water, and then turned the water into wine. John ii. 9. So when the eye, that earthen vessel, hath been filled with water brimful, then Christ will turn the water of tears into the wine of joy.

The spiritual mourner is the fittest person for comfort: when the heart

is broken for sin it is fittest for joy. God pours the oil of comfort into broken vessels ; the mourner's head is emptied of pride, and God fills the empty with his blessing. The valley of tears brings the soul into a paradise of joy ; a sinner's joy brings forth sorrow ; the mourner's sorrow brings forth joy. The saints have a wet seed-time, but a joyful harvest : " They shall be comforted."

These comforts are called " the consolations of God," Job xv. 11, that is, great comforts, such as none but God can give : they exceed all other comforts, as far as heaven doth earth. The root on which these comforts grow is the blessed Spirit : he is called the Comforter, John xiv. 26, and comfort is said to be a " fruit of the Spirit." Gal. v. 22. Christ did purchase peace ; the Spirit speaks peace.

The Spirit comforts, mediately or immediately.

1. Mediately ; by helping us to apply the promises to ourselves, and draw water out of those wells of salvation.

2. The Spirit comforts immediately : the Spirit, by a more direct act, presents God to the soul as reconciled ; it " sheds his love abroad in the heart," whence flows infinite joy. Rom. v. 5. The Spirit secretly whispers pardon for sin, and the sight of a pardon dilates the heart with joy. Matt. ix. 2.

(1.) These comforts are real comforts ; the Spirit of God cannot witness to that which is untrue. The comforts of the saints are certain : they have the seal of the Spirit set to them. Eph. i. 13. 2 Cor. i. 22. They are laid in deep conviction. John xvi. 7, 8. Those who speak of comfort, but were never yet convinced nor broken for sin, have cause to suspect their comfort.

(2.) The comforts of the Spirit are humbling. The more water is poured into a bucket, the lower it descends ; the fuller the ship is laden with sweet spices the lower it sails ; the more a Christian is filled with the sweet comforts of the Spirit, the lower he sails in humility ; the fuller a tree is of fruit, the lower the bough hangs ; the more full we are of the fruits of " the Spirit, joy and peace." Gal. v. 22.

(3.) The comforts God gives his mourners are unmixed ; they are not tempered with any bitter ingredients : worldly comforts are like wine that runs dregs : there is that guilt within which checks and corrodes : " in the midst of laughter the heart is sad." Prov. xiv. 13. The comforts of wicked men are spiced with bitterness, they are wormwood wine ; but spiritual comforts are pure, they are not muddled with guilt, nor mixed with fear.

(4.) They are sweet. How sweet are those comforts which bring the Comforter along with them ! John xiv. 16. Therefore, the love of God shed into the heart is said to be better than wine. Cant. i. 2. Wine pleaseth the palate, but the love of God cheers the conscience. Ps. xxvi. 8.

(5.) They are holy comforts : they are called " the comforts of the Holy Ghost." Acts ix. 31. Every thing propagates in its own kind. The Holy Ghost can no more produce impure joys in the soul, than the sun can produce darkness. Divine comforts give the soul more acquaintance with God. " Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus." 1 John i. 4.

(6.) They are satisfying comforts. Rom. xv. 13. "Ask, that your joy may be full." John xvi. 24. Outward comforts can no more fill the heart than a triangle can fill a circle. Spiritual joys are satisfying. "Thou hast put gladness into my heart;" Ps. iv. 7; lxiii. 5; worldly joys do but put gladness into the face. 2 Cor. v. 12. They rejoice in the face; but the Spirit of God puts gladness into the heart; divine joys are heart-joys. "Your hearts shall rejoice." Zech. x. 7. John xvi. 22. "My spirit rejoiceth in God." Luke i. 47. And, to show how filling these comforts are, which are of a heavenly extraction, the Psalmist says they create greater joy than when "wine and oil increase." Ps. iv. 7. "Thy comforts delight my soul." Ps. xciv. 19.

(7.) They are glorious comforts: "joy full of glory." 1 Pet. i. 8.—1. They are glorious, because they are a foretaste of that joy which we shall have in a glorified state. These comforts are an earnest of glory; they put us in heaven before our time. Eph. i. 13, 14. The comforts of the Spirit are the earnest, the "cluster of grapes at Eshcol;" Num. xiii. 23; the first fruits of the heavenly Canaan.—2. The joys of the Spirit are glorious, in opposition to other joys, which compared with these are inglorious and vile. A carnal man's joy, as it is airy and flashy, so it is sordid; he sucks nothing but dregs.

(8.) They are infinitely transporting: so delightful are they, and amazing, that they cause a jubilation; which, as some of the learned speak, is so great, that it cannot be expressed. Of all things joy is the most hard to be deciphered: it is called "joy unspeakable." 1 Pet. i. 8.

(9.) They are powerful, they are strong cordials, so the apostle phraseth it, "strong consolation." Divine comfort.—1. Strengthens for duty. Neh. viii. 10.—2. Divine comfort supports under affliction. 1 Thess. i. 6. The wine of the Spirit can sweeten the waters of Marah: they who are possessed of these heavenly comforts, can gather grapes of thorns, and fetch honey out of the lion's carcass: they are strong consolations indeed that can stand out against the fiery trial, and turn the flame into a bed of roses. How powerful is that comfort which can make a Christian glory in tribulation! Rom. v. 3. A believer is never so sad but he can rejoice: the bird of paradise can sing in winter. "As sorrowing, yet always rejoicing." 2 Cor. vi. 10. Let death come, a Christian is above it: "O death, where is thy sting?" 1 Cor. xv. 55. At the end of the rod a Christian tastes honey. These are strong consolations.

(10.) The comforts of the Spirit are abiding comforts: as they abound in us, so they abide with us. Worldly comforts are still upon the wing, ready to fly; but the comforts with which God feeds his mourners are immortal. 2 Thess. ii. 16. "They shall be comforted" hereafter. Though in this life some interviews and love tokens pass between God and the mourner, yet the great comforts are kept in reversion: "in God's presence is fulness of joy." Ps. xvi. 11. The saints shall have a spring-tide of joy, and it shall never be low water. The saints shall at that day put off their mourning, and exchange their sable for white robes; then shall the winter be past, and the rain of tears be over and gone. Ps. xxxvi. 8, 9.

How may this be as Bezar stone to keep the hearts of God's people

from fainting! "They shall be comforted;" they shall sit with Christ upon the throne, Rev. iii. 21, and sit down with him at table. Who would not mourn for sin, that are sure to meet with such rewards! "They shall be comforted." The marriage-supper will make amends for the valley of tears. O thou saint of God! who art now watering thy plants and weeping bitterly for sin, at this last and great feast thy "water shall be turned into wine;" thou who now mortifiest thy corruption, and beatest down thy body by prayers and fastings, shalt shortly sup with Christ and angels; thou who didst refuse to touch the forbidden fruit, shalt feed upon the tree of life, in the paradise of God. Thou impoverished saint, who hast scarcely a bit of bread to eat, remember for thy comfort, "in thy Father's house there is bread enough;" and he is making ready a feast for thee, where all the dainties of heaven are served in. O feed with delight upon the thoughts of this marriage-supper! after thy funeral begins thy festival: "wherefore comfort one another with these words." 1 Thess. iv. 18.

OF CONTENTMENT.

I have learnt in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.

Phil. iv. 11.

CONTENTMENT is a branch of true godliness, or rather a super-addition to it, which makes it greatly ornamental and profitable: for "godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Tim. vi. 6. It will be proper to inquire.

I. What it is.

1. It is an entire acquiescence of a man's mind in his lot and portion, in his state and condition in the present life, be it what it may, prosperous or adverse.

As contraries serve to illustrate each other, this may be known by what is contrary to it, or by what it is contrary unto; as, 1. Contentment and envy are contrary to one another; envy and strife go together, and where there is strife and contention, there is no contentment. Envy-ing and fretting meet in the same persons, and are equally deborted from. "Wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one."—2. Contentment is opposite to avarice. Heb. xii. 5. A covetous man cannot be a truly contented man; he cannot be content with what he has, he always wants more.—3. Contentment is opposite to pride and ambition. A proud, ambitious man cannot bear that any should be above him, or upon a footing with him; and when he observes this, it gives him uneasiness: the proud man enlarges his desires as hell, or the grave, and, like that, cannot be satisfied; never says, "it is enough." Prov. xxx. 16.—4. Anxiety of mind, or a distressing care about worldly things, as about food, drink, and raiment, is contrary to true contentment of mind; and therefore our Lord dissuades from it by a variety of arguments, which may be read in Matt. vi. 25—34.—5. Murmurings and repinings under adverse dispensations of Providence, are the reverse of

contentment of mind ; such as are frequently to be observed in the Israelites in the wilderness, who were a discontented people, often murmuring against Moses and Aaron, and repining at afflictive providences ; and from which Christians are dehorted by their example. "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured." Lam. iii. 39.

2. What contentment of mind is, may be learned from the several phrases by which it is expressed in scripture, as,

(1.) By being contented with what a man has.

"Be content with such things as ye have," Heb. xiii. 5, with present things: things future are not the object of contentment. A man is not to look to things to come for it, which he may never have ; but they are present things, things he is now in possession of, he should be content with.—1. Be they more or less, whether a man has a larger or a less share of the things of this world, whether riches or poverty, a man should be content. It was a wise petition of Agur, Prov. xxx. 8 ; but, be it either, a man should be satisfied with what God gives. 1 Tim. vi. 17.—2. Men should be content, as with present advantages and growing profit, so with present losses, which might have been greater : as Job was with the loss of his substance, his children, and his health, and perhaps all in one day. Job i. 21.—3. With present afflictions, of whatsoever kind, whether from God or men ; for in whatsoever way, they rise not out of the dust, nor come by chance, but according to the will and appointment of God : and though not joyous, but grievous, yet sanctified, yield good fruit, and work together for good.—4. Having food and raiment ; food for the present day, and raiment for present use ; let us, says the apostle, "therewith be content:" this was all that Jacob desired to have, Gen. xxviii. 20, 21, and which sometimes good men have been without, and yet contented.

(2.) This contentment of mind is expressed by the apostle from his own experience : "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Phil. iv. 11.—1. The apostle means not his state of unregeneracy ; he says not, in whatsoever state I have been, but in whatsoever state I am : an unregenerate man is content to be in such a state, like Moab of old, at ease from his youth, and settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, but remains quiet and undisturbed ; repents not of his wickedness, saying, what have I done ? is in no apprehension of any danger, safe and secure, and greatly contented with his state ; but this is not here meant. But, 2. His state after conversion, his spiritual state : it may be, believing his covenant-interest in God : "My God shall supply all your need," &c. and being persuaded of his interest in the love of God, and that nothing should separate him from it. There is great reason for this contentment, faith, and expectation ; since "light is sown for the righteous, and to the upright it ariseth in darkness." Ps. cxii. 4.—But, 3. The apostle chiefly means his outward state after conversion, with which he was content ; and which lay in his afflictions, reproaches, and persecutions : these attended him wherever he came, and he expected them, and not only bore them patiently, but endured them with pleasure : "I take pleasure," says he, "in reproaches, in necessities," &c. yea, he gloried in them ; 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10 ; in his bonds and imprisonments : in such a state he was when he

expressed his contentment in whatsoever state he was, and so in that ; for he was in bonds, a prisoner at Rome, when he wrote his Epistle to the Philippians. The phrase, “in whatsoever state,” includes both prosperity and adversity ; an abundance and a scarcity of the necessities of life ; a fulness, and want of them, as explained in the next verse. The wise man says, “In the day of prosperity be joyful :” Eccl. vii. 14 : that is no hard lesson to learn ; “but in the day of adversity consider,” whence it comes, and for what end, and be content with your portion : this is not so easily learned ; the apostle had, however, learned it : as also, to be content both to live and to die ; since he was persuaded Christ would be magnified in his body, whether by life or death. Now such a disposition of mind, as to be content in every state of life, appears in a man’s thankfulness for all he enjoys : when, as advised in every thing, in every state, and for every thing, be it what it may, he gives thanks ; when he makes known his request to God with thanksgivings for what he has had, and asks for what he wants in submission to his will : thus Job blessed God for what he gave him, and when he took it away from him. This grace shows itself much in a quiet resignation of the will to the will of God, in what condition soever a man is, especially in adverse dispensations of Providence ; instances of which we have in Aaron, in Eli, in David, and others. The word used by the apostle, in the place under consideration, for content, properly signifies self-sufficient, or being sufficient of one’s self ; which, strictly speaking, and in the highest sense, is only true of God, who is El-Shaddai, God All-sufficient ; but, in a lower sense, is true of some men ; who, though they have not an underivative sufficiency of themselves, yet receive sufficiency from God.—5. This lesson of contentment is explained by what the apostle says in the following verse : “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound : both to be full and to be hungry ;” Phil. iv. 12 ; that is, he knew by experience what these things meant, and how to behave in such circumstances.

(3.) This contentment of mind is expressed by a man’s having enough. Esau, who was a worldly man, and Jacob, who was spiritual, upright, and a plain-hearted man, both said they had enough, Gen. xxxii. 9—11. but in a different sense ; and, indeed, they use different phrases ; for though they are the same in our version, yet not in the original : Esau at first refused the present of his brother Jacob, saying, “I have enough,” Gen. xxxiii. 9, which may be rendered, have much. Now a man may have much, and yet may want more, and so not be content ; but Jacob urged his brother to take his present, saying, “I have enough ;” or rather as it should be rendered, I have all things, or every thing ; and a man that has every thing, has enough indeed, and has reason to be content ; and this is the case of every gracious man, every true believer in Christ ; and such, therefore, ought to be content.

(4.) This contentment is expressed by a man’s being satisfied with what he has ; earthly riches are not satisfying things. Eccl. v. 10. But riches of grace are satisfying ; Ps. ciii. 5 ; the unsearchable riches of Christ, especially the love of God, is exceedingly satisfying to a gracious soul : “O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessings of the Lord,” Deut. xxxiii. 23, even to contentment : such as are favoured after this manner, “are satisfied with marrow and fatness.”

II. How true contentment of mind is attained.

1. It is not natural to man ; man is naturally a discontented creature, especially since the fall : nay, it was discontent which was the cause of that. Our first parents not being content with the state of happiness in which they were, abode not in it, but fell from it.

2. It is not to be found in a natural or unregenerate man ; such a man is always uneasy and disquieted ; as restless as the troubled sea. There is nothing can satisfy the mind of man but God himself ; and if a man live without God in the world, let him have what he will, he lives a discontented life : there may be content with godliness, but without it there is none.

3. Contentment is a thing that is to be learned ; but not in the school of nature, and by the help of carnal reason. The apostle Paul says, he learned it ; but he learned this not at the feet of Gamaliel, where he was brought up ; nor among the traditions of the elders, where it is not to be found ; for though he was taught after the perfect manner of the fathers of tradition, he was left ignorant of God, and of his law, and of Christ and his righteousness, and of salvation by him ; without which there can be no true contentment. But he learned it, being taught it of God, by the revelation of Jesus Christ : he was instructed in it by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

4. This is learned, not as a theory, but practically and experimentally, and by a train of experiences, and generally through a series of afflictive providences. The apostle Paul learned to be content, not only in, but by, the adverse providences which attended him ; by his dangers at sea and by land ; by his distresses, afflictions, and persecutions for Christ's sake : and so other saints have been instructed, in some measure, in the same way, and have found it true, what the apostle says, " Tribulation works patience." Rom. v. 3, &c.

III. The arguments moving to such a disposition of mind.

1. The consideration of what we had when we came into the world, and what we shall have when we go out of it. 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8. Job i. 21. Ps. xlix. 16, 17.

2. The unalterable will of God is an argument exciting contentment ; who does according to his will, as in the armies of heaven, so among the inhabitants of the earth : he gives to every one their portion in this life, as he thinks fit. Eccl. ix. 11. Nor can any man, with all his care and thought, " add one cubit to his stature." Matt. vi. 27.

3. Unworthiness to enjoy the least favour and mercy at the hand of God, should engage us to be content with what we have ; we have reason to say as Jacob did, " I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies." Gen. xxxii. 10.

4. A consideration of the great things which God has done for us.

5. The great promises God has made to his people of good things, here and hereafter, on the fulfilment of which they may depend, are sufficient to make them easy and contented : this is an argument used by the apostle to engage to contentment. Heb. xiii. 5.

6. Eternal glory and happiness, which are promised, prepared and laid up for the saints, and which they will most certainly enjoy, may serve to make them content with present things. Though the saints now

may have their evil things, they will hereafter have their good things, and shall be fully satisfied when they awake in the Divine likeness : and therefore for the present, should be content with their lot and portion.

7. The saints and people of God have all things in hand, or in promise, or in sure and certain hope : "All things are yours ;" 1 Cor. iii. 22 ; and therefore they may say, as Jacob did, "I have enough ;" or, "I have all things ;" I am content.

OF SELF-DENIAL.

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.—Matt. xvi. 24.

THIS self-denial is one of the hardest lessons to be learned ; no man can be a disciple of Christ without it.

I. Inquire what self-denial is, or what it is for a man to deny himself.

1. It is not to deny what a man is or has, what he truly is, and what he really has, for that would be a falsehood : in this sense, "God cannot deny himself ;" 2 Tim. ii. 13 ; not his nature, and the perfections of it : or do, or affirm any thing contrary thereunto. So a man ought not to deny himself as a man, nor the rational powers which he is possessed of. One may indeed, speaking in the language of another, and as expressing the meanness and contempt in which he is held by such, say, "I am a worm, and no man," as David the type, and Christ his antitype, did ; a man may also, in a comparative sense with respect to others, and as exaggerating his own folly, ignorance, and stupidity, say, as Asaph and Agur. Ps. lxxiii. 22. Prov. xxx. 2. Nor should a man deny what he has of the external benefits and blessings of providence. If God bestows riches and honour upon a man as he did on David, he should own them as coming from God, and bless God for such benefits, and make use of them for the glory of God, and the good of his interest ; and if God has bestowed internal endowments on men, gifts and talents, qualified for public service and usefulness, some way or another, they are to own them, and use them ; and not to wrap them in a napkin, or hide them in the earth, which is interpretatively to deny that they have them. Nor should a truly good and gracious man deny what he is and has, but acknowledge it, and how by grace he came by it ; and say with the apostle, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." If a man is a believer in Christ, he should confess his faith in him. Rom x. 10. Matt. x. 32, 33.

2. To deny a man's self, is not to refuse favours conferred on him in a course of providence, nor to neglect a lawful use of them ; nor to neglect to take care of himself and of his affairs.

3. Self-denial does not require that a man should refuse temporal honours and riches bestowed on him in a providential way : so Joseph, though a self-denying man, did not refuse the honours and the tokens of them Pharaoh gave him, when he made him ruler over the land of Egypt ; nor David, when the tribes made him king over all Israel ; nor Daniel,

when he was advanced in Nebuchadnezzar's court, and was honoured by Belshazzar, and prospered in the reigns of Darius and Cyrus; but these good men improved them all to the glory of God and the good of others.

4. Nor are the creatures of God, and the use of them, to be rejected; 1 Tim. iv. 4; nor ought a man to debar himself of the free and lawful use of them. Eccl. ii. 24; vi. 1, 2.

5. Nor should a man be careless of his life, and health, and family, though he should not be anxiously careful for life, nor food and raiment to support and secure it; yet he may be lawfully careful for life, which is better than them. 1 Tim. v. 23. And, in like manner, a man should be careful for his family; which, should he not, it would be so far from being reckoned self-denial, in a good sense, that it might be justly treated as a denial of the faith. 1 Tim. v. 8.

6. There is a self-love which is not criminal, nor contrary to the grace of self-denial. Eph. v. 29. An inordinate love of man's self, which is the source of all sin, of covetousness, pride, blasphemy, disobedience to parents, ingratitude, &c. is carefully to be avoided. 2 Tim. iii. 2—4.

7. Nor is it self-denial, or any part of it, to abuse the body in any respect; and even on religious accounts, by cutting it with knives and lancets, as Baal's priests; or by lashing it with whips and scourges; Col. ii. 23; nor should any thing be done that endangers his life.

Self-denial lies in a man's renouncing, foregoing, and postponing all his pleasures, profits, relations, interests, and whatever he enjoys, which may be in competition with Christ, from love to him, and to be given up at his command. A self-denying man seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and leaves all other things with God, to bestow upon him as he thinks fit; and what he has given him he is ready to give back again when called for, preferring Christ to all things in heaven and earth. A self-denying Christian is made willing to part,

First, with natural and civil self, with things relative both to soul and body, of which a man's self consists.

The soul, with its powers and faculties of understanding, will, and affections: and there are self-denying acts which respect each of these.

1. The understanding; and it is a self-denying act in a man to lean not to his own understanding, which is natural to him; but give it up to God, to be instructed and directed by him in all religious matters; reason is brought to stoop to divine revelation, and their carnal reasonings and vain imaginations, and their high-towering and exalted thoughts of themselves, and of their own understandings, are cast down, and brought into the obedience of Christ.

2. The will; and then does a man deny himself, when his will becomes subject to the will of God; when, with good old Eli, he says, "It is the Lord:" and so the friends of the apostle Paul, when they were so desirous of his continuance, and found that all entreaties prevailed not, said, "The will of the Lord be done!" and when in all cases, the will of a man is brought to this, then may he be said to deny himself, of which Christ is a pattern to him. "Not my will, but thine be done!" Matt. xxvi. 39.

3. The affections: these are sometimes called "inordinate affections,"

Col. iii. 5, as when they are out of due course and order; when the world, and the things of it, are loved with an immoderate love, in a manner inconsistent with the love of God, and when friends and relations are loved more than Christ: now self-denial checks and restrains the affections, and reduces them to proper order.

The body, and its members, and things relative to that, and all external things: about these self-denial is exercised.

1. When the members of the body are restrained from the service of sin. Rom. vi. 12, 13.

2. When external honours from men are not sought for, only the honour which comes from God; when a man is content to suffer the loss of fame and credit among men, for Christ's sake; and to suffer all indignities for the sake of religion. This is self-denial: an instance of this we have in Moses. Heb. xi. 24, 25.

3. When worldly profits and emoluments are left for the sake of Christ and the interest of religion: this is self-denial. Matt. iv. 20—22; ix. 9. An instance to the contrary of all this we have of a young man. Matt. xix. 16—22.

4. The nearest and dearest friends and relations, which are a part of man's self, these are to be left when God calls for it: so Abraham was commanded to come out of his country and kindred, and his father's house; Luke xiv. 26. A great instance of self-denial of this kind we have in Abraham, who was called to part with his son.

5. Health and hazard of life; as when men risk their health in the service of God and Christ, and true religion: so Epaphroditus, for the work of Christ was nigh unto death; and many, like the apostle Paul, have spent and been spent in the cause of God; and Aquila and Priscilla were ready to lay down their own necks for the apostle; that is, to risk their lives for his sake.

6. Life itself is to be laid down when called for: the apostle Paul did not count his life dear to himself. Matt. xvi. 24, 25.

Secondly. Another branch of self-denial lies in denying sinful self: this lesson not nature but grace teaches, even to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, which includes all kinds of sin; internal lusts and external actions of sin; sins of heart, lip, and life; every thing that is contrary to God and his righteous law. This is a hard lesson to learn. Some sins are right hand and right eye sins, as dear as the right hand and right eye be; and to cut off and pluck out such, and cast them away, is a great piece of self-denial. A branch of this part of self-denial lies in parting with sinful companions, which are a sort of second self; as also to bear their reproaches, revilings and censures, on refusing to associate with them. Isa. lix. 15.

Thirdly. Another branch of self-denial is to deny righteous self, which is not to refuse to do works of righteousness for necessary uses, to glorify God, to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour; but to deny righteous self, is to renounce all trust in and dependence on a man's own righteousness for justification before God, and acceptance with him, and submit to the righteousness of Christ, and depend upon that for such purposes. Phil. iii. 6—9.

II. The arguments, or motives, to excite to the exercise of this grace of self-denial, in the several branches of it.

1. It is required of them ; it is an injunction of Christ on his disciples, even all of them ; Matt. xvi. 24 ; nay, this is necessary to a man's being a disciple of Christ ; he cannot be one without it. See Luke xiv. 26, 27.

2. Christ has not only commanded it, but he has set an example of it himself ; he denied himself for our sakes. Phil. ii. 5—8.

3. The examples of saints in all ages may serve to excite and encourage to it ; as of Abraham, Moses, and the Old Testament saints and martyrs, who suffered bonds, imprisonment, trial of cruel mockings, and death itself.

4. If a man do not deny himself, as required of God, he sets up himself for God ; makes a God for himself, lives to himself, and not to God.

5. The loss and gain of not denying, and of denying self, should be considered. Such who think to save themselves by not denying themselves, lose themselves and their own souls ; lose Christ and his righteousness, heaven and eternal life ; when those who deny themselves for Christ's sake, find the life of their souls, gain Christ and his righteousness, have treasure in heaven, the recompense of reward, the more enduring substance. Heb. x. 34.

OF

RESIGNATION TO THE WILL OF GOD.

It is the Lord ; let him do what seemeth him good.—1 Sam. iii. 18.

SUBMISSION, or resignation of the will of man to the will of God, is a part of self-denial, and, therefore, properly next requires a distinct consideration. It is no other than an entire acquiescence in the will of God in all things, and especially in adverse dispensations of Providence, which is a trial of it ; as in Eli, when he was told of the distresses that should come upon his family, said, " It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good ;" and in much the same temper and disposition of mind was David, when he ordered the ark to be carried back to Jerusalem, which he was obliged to leave. 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. This is no other than for a man to have his will swallowed up in the will of God, and to have no will of his own, but what is the Lord's : this highly becomes a Christian.

I. The various phrases by which submission to the will of God is expressed.

1. To be still, and quiet, and easy : " Be still, and know that I am God ;" Ps. xlv. 10 ; which is directed to amidst the commotions, stirs, and tumults in the world, and the desolations made in the earth, as the context shows, and is to be understood,

(1.) Not of insensibility : that men should be as still as a stone, or be like stocks and stones, senseless and unconcerned : they should be sensible of the hand of God in his providences, and own it as directed to in the exhortation, " Know that I am God ;" own and acknowledge

my hand in all these things; so Eli said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good:" and so Job, "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away." Job i. 21. They should be sensible of the cause of these things; for, as David said, "Is there not a cause?" There are two extremes often in men under the afflicting hand of God; either they are apt to faint, and sink under an affliction, or to neglect it, overlook it. Nor,

(2.) Of a stoical apathy is the phrase to be understood; as if a man should be quite unaffected with an afflictive providence: though the affections are to be checked, when they become inordinate, yet there may be a due use of them. When Job lost all his substance as well as his children, and was all submission to the will of God, yet he gave manifest tokens of his affections being moved by the providence; as by rending his mantle, shaving his head, and falling down upon the ground: and though Christians are not sorry for the loss of relations and friends, as the heathens without hope, and in that immoderate and barbarous manner they did, yet may with moderation: Abraham went to Hebron to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her, when dead; and Joseph made a mourning for his father seven days; devout men carried Stephen to his grave, and made great lamentation over him; and Christ himself wept over the grave of Lazarus.

(3.) Nor is the phrase expressive of inactivity. The strength of men in such cases is not to sit still and do nothing; there is much to be done under afflictive providences; as various graces to be exercised. When men are chastened by the Lord, they are called upon to be zealous, and repent; and they have need of faith and confidence in the Divine promises to support them, which should not be cast away, but exercised; and of patience, that when they have done the will of God, by suffering afflictions, they may receive the promises. And there are duties to be performed, as both prayer and praise. But,

(4.) It is opposed to the fretting of the mind at the prosperity of others, and at their own adversity; which is dehorted from, "Fret not thyself," &c. Ps. xxxvii. 1, 7, 8. And to all impatience, restlessness, and disquietude under the hand of God: the phrase signifies composure of mind, sedateness, a quiet submission to the will of God.

2. Submission to the will of God is expressed by a man's holding his peace, and being dumb and silent: thus Aaron, when he lost his two sons in an awful manner, by fire from heaven, "held his peace," Lev. x. 3; said not one word against what was done, or as complaining of the providence; so David was dumb when under a sore affliction, Ps. xxxix. 9. And of a good man under the yoke of affliction, it is said, "he sitteth alone and keepeth silence." Lam. iii. 28. Now,

(1.) All this is to be understood, not as though there was nothing to be said under an afflictive providence; for it should be owned that it is of God, that it is of his appointing, in his secret purposes and decrees. Job xxiii. 14. Job is there speaking chiefly of his afflictions, and has respect to them; and, as they are appointed in God's purposes, they are brought on by his overruling providence; there is no evil of such a kind in a city, but the Lord has done it: he makes peace and creates evil; adversity and prosperity are from him, and he sets the one against

the other. It should also be acknowledged by the saints, that they are deserving of such afflictions. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? It may be expected. Nor should the people of God be silent in prayer under such providences; God expects to hear from them then. "In their affliction they will seek me early," for help, support and deliverance. Nor should they be silent in praise to God, but bless his name; since it might have been worse with them than it is; especially when they are taught of God under their afflictions, and by them, and when they evidently see that they work together for their good; and they should not fail to speak to others of the goodness of God to them; of their gracious experiences in their afflictions; how the everlasting arms are underneath them; their bed is made in their sickness; God is with them when they pass through the fire and through the waters, and he chooses them in the furnace of affliction. But,

(2.) Such silence is opposed to murmuring against God and complaining of his providence, as the Israelites in the wilderness did; and to charging his ways with inequality, as the Jews, in the time of Ezekiel: but it denotes such behaviour as Job's, under such providences. Job i. 22.

3. Submission to the will of God is expressed by "hearing the rod, and him who has appointed it." Mic. vi. 9. By the rod is meant the rod of correction with which God, as a father, scourges and chastises his children; called the rod of God, because of his appointing, and which he makes use of in a fatherly way; and the rod of man, because it is no other than what is common to men, and is used in a kind and tender way, after the manner of men. In which rod there is the voice of the Lord, which cries unto men in a way of reproof for sin, and by commanding them to return from iniquity; which calls for humiliation, and instructs in the way of duty; and then it is heard and hearkened to, when men are obedient, and submit to the will of God, signified by it; when their ears are opened to discipline, and they attend to it, and instruction is sealed unto them, and they are impressed by it.

4. The same is signified by men "humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God," according to the exhortation in 1 Pet. v. 6: by the hand of God is meant his correcting and chastising hand, which sometimes is heavy and presses sore; and which Job felt, and therefore cried to his friends to have pity on him, because the hand of the Lord was upon him; and strong is his hand, and high is his right hand; and which, though it is laid on in mercy, yet sometimes is very heavy and distressing: and the end and use of it is to humble men; as all the Lord's dealings with the Israelites in the wilderness were to humble them, and to prove them: so are all the Lord's dispensations of providence towards his people, to hide pride from them, and to bring them to his feet, and to own his sovereignty over them; and this is the way to be exalted. In short, all these phrases are expressive of submission to the will of God: the language of them is, "The will of the Lord be done!" Acts xxi. 14. And, indeed, this should be submitted to in all things; and it should be the constant language of the saints, with respect to every thing in which they are concerned: "If the Lord will, we shall do this or that." James iv. 15. "If the Lord will" will be

comes the mouth of a Christian at all times, who ought to be all submission to God, and to be wholly absorbed in the will of God ; for which,

II. The following reasons may be given :

1. Whatever is done in providence is done by the Lord, his will and hand are in it ; and this should reconcile the will of man to it, be it what it may ; so said Eli, "It is the Lord, who hath said it, and will do it ; let him do what seemeth him good." It was the consideration of this, that the Lord was concerned in all Job's losses, that it was he who gave and took away, which made them sit so easy on his mind, and caused him to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord !" and this is what makes and keeps the mind quiet and still, under the most afflictive providences, to know that it is the Lord who wills them. As,

(1.) That he is a Sovereign Being, who does according to his will in heaven and in earth.

(2.) That he is immutable, and his will is irresistible ; his mind is invariable, and his purpose unalterable ; who shall disannul it, make it void and of none effect ?

(3.) He is not accountable to his creatures ; nor is it fitting and reasonable that he should : they are accountable to him, but not he to them ; therefore, "he giveth no account of any of his matters." Job xxxiii. 13. As none can stay his hand, or stop the course of his providence, so none ought to say to him, "What doest thou ?"

(4.) That he is the wise, and the only wise God, and does all his works in wisdom ; though he does all things according to his will, in a sovereign way, yet after the counsel of his own will, in the best and wisest manner ; as all his works, in nature and in grace, are made in wisdom, so his works of providence ; in which there is a *bathos*, a depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. What is said of Christ with respect to his miracles, "he hath done all things well," is true of God in the dispensations of his providence, and therefore to be submitted to.

(5.) That he is holy and righteous in all his ways and works, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

(6.) That he is a faithful God, and it is in faithfulness he afflicts his people. Ps. lxxxix. 33, 34.

(7.) That all his ways are love and mercy to his people, and when he chastises he loves ; the rod is in a Father's hand, and should be submissively attended to.

2. What is done by the Lord seems good to him, and what seems good to him must be good. "Let him do what seemeth him good ;" he is good originally and underivatively, the fountain of all goodness ; there is nothing but goodness in him, and nothing else comes from him or is done by him : "Thou art good, and doest good," says David. Ps. cxix. 68. All he did in creation was very good, and all he does in providence is very good, even in the adverse dispensations of it. When Isaiah, from the Lord, told Hezekiah what evil things should befall his posterity, he replied, "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken." Isa. xxxix. 6—8. What God does, it is his pleasure to do, and he will do all his pleasure ; he sits in the heavens, and does whatever he pleases ; and what pleases him should please us.

OF SINCERITY.

Thou desirest truth in the inward parts.—Ps. li. 6.

SINCERITY, I conceive, is not properly a grace, but rather the ingredient in every grace: sincerity is that which doth qualify grace, and without which, grace is not true: "Grace be with them who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." Eph. vi. 24. Sincerity qualifies our love; sincerity is to grace as the blood and spirits are to the body; there can be no life without the blood, so no grace without sincerity.

The word for *sincere* signifies without plaits and folds: a good man is plain-hearted, having no subtle subtrefuges: religion is the livery he wears, and this livery is lined with sincerity.

I. Wherein doth Christian sincerity appear?

1. He is that which he seems to be: he is a Jew inwardly. Grace runs through his heart, as silver through the veins of the earth; the hypocrite is not what he seems. A picture is like a man, but it wants breath; the hypocrite is an effigy, a picture; he doth not breathe forth sanctity, he is but like an angel on a sign-post: a sincere man answers to his professions, as a transcript to the original.

2. He labours to approve himself to God in every thing. 2 Cor v. 9. It is better to have God approve, than the world applaud. There is a time shortly coming, when a smile from God's face will be infinitely better than all the applauses of men: how sweet will that word be! Matt. xxv. 21. The sincere Christian is ambitious of God's letters testimonial; approves his heart to God.

3. He is ingenuous in laying open his sins. Ps. xxxii. 5. The hypocrite doth veil and smother his sin like a patient that hath some loathsome disease in his body; he will rather die than confess his disease; but the sincere soul doth, as it were, point with his finger to the sore.

4. He hath blessed designs in all he doth; he propounds this end in every ordinance, that he may have more acquaintance with God, and bring more glory to God; as the herb *heliostrophon* turns about according to the motion of the sun, so the good man's actions do all move towards the glory of God.

5. He abhors dissimulation towards men; his heart goes along with his tongue; he cannot flatter and hate, Ps. xv. 1—3, commend and censure. "Let love be without dissimulation." Rom. xii. 9. Dissembled love is worse than hatred; counterfeiting of friendship is no better than a lie, Ps. lxxviii. 36, for there is a pretence of that which is not. Many are like Joab. 2 Sam. xx. 9, 10.

There is a river in Spain, where the fish seem to be of a golden colour, but take them out of the water, and they are like other fish. All is not gold that glistens; there are some pretend much kindness, but if you lean upon them, they are as a leg out of joint; for my part, I much question his truth towards God, that will flatter and lie to his friend. Prov. x. 18. By all that hath been said, we may try whether or not we be sincere.

II. The advantages of sincerity.

1. Sincerity renders us lovely in God's eyes; God saith to the sincere soul as of Sion, "This is my rest for ever." Ps. cxxxii. 14. A sincere heart is God's paradise of delight. Noah found grace in God's eyes; why, what did God see in Noah? He was girt with the girdle of sincerity. Gen. vi. 9. Truth resembles God; and when God sees a sincere heart, he sees his own image, and he cannot but choose fall in love with it. Prov. xi. 20.

2. Sincerity makes our services find acceptance with God: the church of Philadelphia had but little strength; her grace was weak, her services slender, yet of all the churches Christ wrote to, he found the least fault with her. What was the reason? because she was most sincere. Rev. iii. 8. Though we cannot pay God all we owe, yet a little in current coin is accepted; God takes sincerity for full payment. A little gold, though rusty, is better than alchymy, be it ever so bright; a little sincerity, though rusted over with many infirmities, is of more value with God than all the glorious flourishes of hypocrites.

3. Sincerity is our safety; false hearts, that will step out of God's way, and use carnal policy, when they think to be most safe, are least secure; he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely. Prov. x. 9. A sincere Christian will do nothing but what the word warrants, and that is safe as to the conscience. Nay, oftentimes, such as are upright in their way, the Lord takes care of their outward safety. "I laid me down and slept." Ps. iii. 5. David was now surrounded with enemies, yet God did so encamp about him by his providence, that he could sleep securely as in a garri-son. "The Lord sustained me." (Ver. 5.) The only way to be safe is to be sincere.

4. Sincerity is gospel-perfection. Job i. 8. Though a Christian be full of infirmities, and like a child that is put out to nurse, weak and feeble, yet God looks upon him as if he were completely righteous: every true saint hath the Thummim of perfection upon his breast-plate.

5. Sincerity is that which the devil strikes most at: Satan's spite was not so much at Job's estate as his integrity: he would have wrested the shield of sincerity from him, but Job held that fast. Job xxvii. 6. A thief doth not fight for an empty purse, but for money; the devil would have robbed Job of the jewel of a good conscience, and then he had been poor Job indeed! Satan doth not oppose profession, but sincerity. Sincerity is our Port-royal, where our chief treasure lies; this fort is most shot at, therefore, let us be more careful to preserve it. While a man keeps his castle, his castle will keep him: while we keep sincerity, sincerity will keep us.

6. Sincerity is the beauty of a Christian: wherein lies the beauty of a diamond, but in this, that it is a true diamond? If it be counterfeit, it is worth nothing: so, wherein lies the beauty of a Christian, but in this, that he hath "truth in the inward parts?" Ps. li. 6. Sincerity is a Christian's ensign of glory; it is both his breast-plate to defend him, and his crown to adorn him.

7. The vileness of hypocrisy: the Lord would have no leaven offered up in sacrifice; leaven did typify hypocrisy. Luke xii. 1. The hypocrite doth the devil double service; under the visor of piety he can sin more, and be less suspected. Matt. xxiii. 14. Who would think they

were guilty of extortion, that would pray so many hours together? Who would suspect him of false weights, that hath the Bible so often in his hands? Who would think he would slander, that seems to fear an oath? Hypocrites are the worst of sinners, they reflect infinite dishonour upon religion; hypocrisy, for the most part, ends in scandal, and that brings an evil report upon the ways of God. The hypocrite is a liar; he worships God with his knee, and his lusts with his heart; like those, 2 Kings xvii. 33.

8. If the heart be sincere, God will overlook many failings. Num. xxiii. 21. God's love doth not make him blind, he can see infirmities; but how? Not with an eye of revenge, but pity; as a physician sees a disease in his patient to heal him. Isa. lvii. 18. He sees the integrity, and pardons the infirmity: how much did God overlook in Asa! "The high places were not removed;" yet it is said, "the heart of Asa was perfect all his days." 2 Chron. xv. 17. We esteem a picture, though it be not drawn at the full length: so, though the graces of God's people are not drawn at their full length, nay, have many scars and spots, yet have something of God in sincerity, they shall find mercy. God loves the sincere, and it is the nature of love to cover infirmity.

9. Nothing but sincerity will give us comfort in an hour of trouble. King Hezekiah, though he had been dying, yet this revived him, that conscience drew up a certificate for him. "Remember, O, Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth," &c. Isa. xxxviii. 2, 3. Sincerity was the best flower of his crown. What a golden shield will this be against Satan, when he shall roar upon us by his temptations, and set our sins before us on our death-bed! Then we shall answer, "It is true, Satan, these have been our miscarriages, but we have bewailed them: if we have sinned, it was against the bent and purposes of our hearts:" this will stop the devil's mouth, and put him to a retreat; therefore labour for this jewel of sincerity. 1 John iii. 21. "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." If we are cleared at the petty sessions in our own conscience, then we may be confident we shall be acquitted at the great assizes at the day of judgment.

OF ZEAL.

It is good to be zealously affected.—Gal. iv. 18.

ZEAL is an ardour of mind, a fervent affection for some person or thing; with an indignation against every thing supposed to be pernicious and hurtful to it. As it is a divine grace, it is a vehement affection for God and his glory: an earnest study, by all proper means, to promote it; with a resentment of every thing that tends to obscure, let, and hinder it; it is hot, burning, flaming love, which cannot be quenched by water, nor drowned by floods, nor abated, restrained and stopped by any difficulties in the way. It is sometimes used for that strong affection God bears to his people, expressed by his earnest care of them, and indignation against their enemies, called "the zeal of the Lord of hosts," and

his "great jealousy." Isa. ix. 7. Zech. i. 14 ; viii. 2. And sometimes for a gracious disposition in man, which has God for its object, and is called "zeal towards God," and eager desire after his glory ; and of which God is the author, and is called, "a zeal of God," or, "a godly jealousy." 2 Cor. xi. 2. In treating of which, I shall consider,

I. The various sorts and kinds of zeal : that it may be the better known what is right and genuine. And,

1. There is a "zeal of God, which is not according to knowledge," which the Jews had, as the apostle testifies, Rom. x. 2 ; and which lay in a zealous concern for the performance of legal duties, and in a studious attempt to set them up, and establish them as a justifying righteousness before God, to the entire neglect and rejection of the righteousness of Christ.

2. There is a mistaken zeal of the glory of God, and for it.—1. When that is opposed which is right, under a false notion of its being contrary to the glory of God. Num. xi. 28. John ix. 24. Matt. xvi. 22 ; xxi. 23.—2. When that which is not for the glory of God, is wrongly thought to be so, and is zealously pursued as such. Gal. i. 14. Acts xxi. 20.—3. When ways and methods improper are taken to defend and promote the glory of God. Luke ix. 54 ; xxii. 50.

3. There is a superstitious zeal, such as was in Baal's worshippers, who cut themselves with knives and lancets ; particularly in the Athenians, who were wholly given to idolatry, and whose city was full of idols, Acts xvii. 22 ; and in the Jews, who were zealous of the traditions of the fathers, and were superstitiously careful that they did not eat with unwashen hands, and of the washing of their cups and pots, &c.

4. There is a persecuting zeal, under a pretence of the glory of God : so Saul, before his conversion, says of himself, "Concerning zeal, persecuting the church." Acts xxii. 3, 4.

5. There is an hypocritical zeal for God ; as in Jehu, when he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord," 2 Kings x. 16 ; when, at the same time, "he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord ;" and in the pharisees, who made a great show of zeal for piety, by their long prayers, when they only sought to destroy widows' houses by that means.

6. There is a contentious zeal, which often gives great trouble to Christian communities : of men of such a spirit the apostle speaks, when he says, "If any man seem to be contentious," 1 Cor. xi. 16, about trivial matters, things indifferent, and of no moment, we have no such custom, nor the churches of God ; nor should such be indulged.

7. Sometimes it is only a temporary passion ; a flash of zeal, and continues not. So Joash, while Jehoiada the priest lived, did what was right, and showed zeal in repairing the house of God : but, after his death, left the house of the Lord God of his fathers, and served groves and idols. So the Galatians were zealously affected towards the apostle Paul, to such a degree, that they would have been willing to have plucked out their eyes and given them to him, whom they first received as an angel of God, even as Jesus Christ, so acceptable was his ministry ; and yet he became their enemy, because of his preaching the same truths.

8. True zeal is no other than a fervent, ardent love to God and Christ, and a warm concern for their honour and glory. Such who are truly zealous for the Lord of hosts, love him with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength. They love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, as well as one another fervently. It is accompanied with a saving knowledge of God and Christ; of God in Christ, and of Christ and him crucified; and such prefer the excellency of the knowledge of Christ above all things else, and prefer him to all created beings. They have faith in God, and also in Christ; a faith which works by love, and this love constrains them, inspires them with zeal to seek his honour and glory: whatever they do, whether in things civil or religious, they do all to the glory of God. In true zeal there must be spiritual knowledge, unfeigned faith, and undissembled love; and thus it stands opposed,—1. To a neutral spirit in religion, to a halting between two opinions, condemned by Elijah in the Jews. 1 Kings xviii. 21.—2. To carelessness and indifference about religious matters.—3. To lukewarmness with respect to divine and spiritual things, which the Laodicean church is charged with, and is resented by Christ. Rev. iii. 15, 16.

II. The objects of zeal.

1. The object of it is God. Even a false zeal is called “a zeal towards God;” and that which is not according to knowledge, is said to be “a zeal of God.” Jehu called his hypocritical zeal, a “zeal for the Lord:” true zeal most deservedly bears this name: so Phineas had the covenant of an everlasting priesthood given him, “because he was zealous for his God;” Num. xxv. 13; which springs from a principle of love to God, and its end is his glory; and it has for its object the worship of God, and the word of God, and the truths contained in it.

(1.) The worship of God; who must be known, or he cannot be worshipped aright: the Samaritans worshipped they knew not what, and the Athenians erected an altar to the unknown God: and, therefore, though they were both zealous of worship, their zeal was not according to knowledge. But true believers worship God in the Spirit, whom they know in a spiritual way, through faith in Christ, and with a zealous concern of his glory: and they worship him in truth, and keep close to the pattern of worship shown to them, to which they are zealously attached, and will not depart from it. Wherefore,—(2.) The word of God is the object of their zeal. To the law and to the testimony they appeal for the truth of all they say and do: they make that the standard of their faith and practice, and the rule of their worship. 2 Cor. ii. 17.—(3.) The truths contained in the word. They who have zeal are valiant for the truth, and can do nothing against it; but every thing for it, in defence of it, and for the continuance of it.

2. The cause of Christ is another object of zeal; and which is a good one; and the apostle says, “it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing;” Gal. iv. 18; and those who are possessed of this zealous affection, seek not their own things, but the things of Christ. True zeal for the cause of Christ is concerned about the gospel of Christ, the ordinances of Christ, and the discipline of his house.

(1.) The gospel of Christ: great reason there is to be zealous for that since it is the gospel of the grace of God, which displays the free grace

of God in every part of our salvation ; and therefore the apostle was so zealously concerned for it, as not to count his life dear to himself, so that he might finish his course with joy, by bearing a testimony to it.—(2.) The ordinances of Christ, which every true Christian should be zealous for, that they be kept as they were first delivered, without any innovation or corruption.—(3.) The discipline of Christ's house should be the object of our zeal, as it was of his who said, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." Ps. lxxix. 9. And this is shown when the rules of discipline are strictly observed, both with respect to private and public offences: when churches, and the members of them, like the church at Ephesus, cannot bear them which are evil to continue in fellowship with them.

3. True zeal is concerned in all the duties of religion, and shows itself in them. In the service of God in general, we should be fervent in spirit, warm, hot, zealous, serving the Lord in such a manner, and not in a cold, indifferent way ; and in the ministration of the gospel. It is said of Apollos, that being "fervent in spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord," the doctrines of the gospel, so far as he was then acquainted with them. Acts xviii. 25. It is also very requisite in prayer to God ; Col. iv. 12 ; James v. 16 ; and it should be shown in the love of the saints to one another. 1 Pet. i. 22, and iv. 8. In short, believers in Christ ought to be "zealous for good works," careful to maintain them, diligent in the performance of them, especially of those which are the greater and weightier duties of religion ; though they are not to neglect and omit the lesser ones. 1 Cor. xii. 31 ; 2 Cor. vii. 7.

III. Motives or arguments exciting to the exercise of true zeal.

1. The example of Christ, whom David in prophetic language personated, saying, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up ;" consumed his spirits, his strength, and life.

2. True zeal answers a principal end of the redemption of Christ ; Tit. ii. 14 ; and where there is no zeal for God, and for that which he requires an observance of, the claim of redemption seems very precarious.

3. It is good, the apostle says, to be zealously affected in and for that which is good ; and it is approved and commended by Christ, as the church at Ephesus was for it, because she could not bear them that were evil ; and a contrary disposition, that of lukewarmness, is disapproved of and resented ; as in the church of Laodicea, threatened to be unchurched for it, and therefore strongly exhorted to be "zealous and repent." Rev. iii. 15, 16, 19, 20.

4. A lukewarm temper, which is the opposite to zeal, seems not consistent with true religion, which has always life and heat in it. To be neither cold nor hot is condemned as having no religion at all.

5. The zeal of persons shown in a false way, should stimulate the professors of the true religion to show at least an equal zeal ; for that all people will walk every one in the name of the Lord his God, and appear zealous for his worship,—“we will walk in the name of the Lord our God ;” and, in order to keep up and promote such zeal, it will be proper frequently to meditate on the love of God and Christ, the blessings of the gospel of the grace of God, the excellency of the Chris-

tian religion, the benefits and privileges of the house of God, and to converse often with warm and lively Christians, and to sit under a savoury and fervent ministry.

CHRISTIAN MAGNANIMITY.

That you would walk worthy of God, &c.—1 Thess. ii. 12.

THERE are some branches of true religion which are universally approved, and which impiety itself cannot speak against ; such as truth and integrity in speech, honesty in dealing, humanity and compassion to persons in distress. But there are other particulars, in which the worldly virtue and the Christian virtue seem to be different things. Of these I shall select one, as an example, viz : spirit, dignity, or greatness of mind. This seems to be entirely of the worldly cast : it holds a very high place in the esteem of all worldly men : the boldest pretensions are often made to it, by those who treat religion with neglect, and religious persons with disdain or defiance. It is also a virtue of a very dazzling appearance ; ready to captivate the mind, and particularly to make a deep impression on young persons, when they first enter into life. At the same time, the gospel seems to stand directly opposed to it ; the humility of the creature, the abasement and contrition of the sinner, the dependence and self-denial of the believer, and above all, the shame and reproach of the cross itself, seem to conspire in obliging us to renounce it.

What shall we say, then, my brethren ? Shall we say that magnanimity is no virtue at all, and that no such excellence belongs to human nature ? Or shall we admit that there is a beauty and excellence in it ; confessing, at the same time, that it does not belong to religion, and only say, that though we want this, we have many other and better qualities in its place ? To this I can never agree ; for every real excellence is consistent with every other ; nay, every real excellence is adorned and illustrated by every other. Vices may be inconsistent with each other, but virtues never can. And therefore, as magnanimity is an amiable and noble quality, one of the greatest ornaments of our nature, so I affirm, that it belongs only to true and undefiled religion, and that every appearance of the one, without the other, is not only defective, but false.

In the passage which I have chosen as the subject of my discourse, you see the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians to walk suitably to the dignity of their character and the importance of their privileges ; which is a short but just description of true and genuine greatness of mind.

My single purpose, from these words, at this time, is to explain and recommend magnanimity as a Christian virtue ; and I wish to do it in such a manner, as neither to weaken its lustre, nor admit any degree of that corrupt mixture, by which it is often counterfeited and greatly debased.

I. State the principles of magnanimity, in general, as a natural quality.

1. It belongs to magnanimity to attempt great and difficult things. Those who, from a love of sloth and ease, neglect the exercise or improvement of their powers ; and those who apply them with ever so great assiduity and attention to things mean, or of small consequence, are plainly destitute of this quality. The vigorous exertion of all our powers, and, particularly, the application of them to things of moment and difficulty.

2. It belongs to magnanimity to aspire after great and valuable possessions. It is more difficult properly to illustrate this as a branch of magnanimity, because of its frequent perversion, which will be afterwards explained. It seems, however, to be necessarily included in the general character. A great mind has great capacities of enjoyment as well as action. The large and increasing desires of the human mind have often been made an argument for the dignity of our nature, and our having been made for something that is great and excellent.

3. It belongs to magnanimity to encounter danger with resolution. This is inseparable from and constitutes a leading part of the character. Even the most excellent and valuable services to mankind, if they are attended with no difficulty at all, or meet with no opposition, though they retain the character of useful, yet, for want of this circumstance, they lose that greatness. Many when they speak of magnanimity, mean nothing else but courage ; and when they speak of meanness, have little other idea but that of timidity.

4. It belongs to greatness to struggle against difficulties with steadiness and perseverance. Perseverance is nothing else but continued and inflexible courage. We see some persons who show the greatest activity and boldness for a season ; but time and opposition weaken their force, and seem, if I may so speak, to exhaust their courage, as if they wasted the power by the exertion. Perseverance, therefore, is necessary to greatness. Few things are more contrary to this character than fickleness and unsteadiness.

5. In the last place, it belongs to greatness to bear sufferings with fortitude and patience. This is a kindred quality to the former, and is necessary to complete the character of magnanimity. Such is the state of human things, that suffering is, in one way or another, wholly unavoidable. It often happens that difficulties cannot be removed, or enemies cannot be conquered ; and then it is the last effort of greatness of mind to bear the weight of the one, or the cruelty of the other, with firmness and patience.

Having thus pointed out the principles, or rather enumerated the chief effects of magnanimity, as a natural quality, let us now,

II. Consider what is necessary to give it real value as a moral virtue.

1. The object of our desires must be just as well as great. Some of the noblest powers of the human mind have often been exerted in invading the rights, instead of promoting the interest and happiness of mankind. As the history of the world is little else than the history of human guilt ; so many of the illustrious names, transmitted down to us, have been those of the most active and successful destroyers of their fellow-creatures. There may be, and there have been in such persons, many or most of the ingredients of natural greatness of mind ; but they have

only served to make the characters, in the eye of reason, more hideous and detestable.

2. Our desires ought to be governed by wisdom and prudence, as well as justice. If any person either forms difficult projects, or aspires after great possessions, and, in prosecution of his purposes, exerts ever so much courage, fortitude, and patience, yet if these designs are less useful, or those possessions less valuable, than others to which he might have applied the same talents, it cannot deserve the name of true magnanimity. If any person, for example, forms a resolution of exerting his skill in such feats of performance as have nothing or little value in them, but that they are difficult and uncommon, I think no man will pretend that he has any title to the character of greatness of mind; otherwise a rope-dancer might be a hero; or, if any person should spend a whole life, in the most unwearied application, to the single purpose of accumulating wealth, however vast his desire, or however astonishing his success, his merit would be very small.

3. The principle of action must be honourable, as well as the achievements illustrious. If a person do things ever so extraordinary in their nature, overcome the greatest difficulties, or brave the most formidable dangers, merely to make his name famous, we must at once perceive how much it detracts even from his name itself. This is not the language of religion only, it is the language of reason, and the dictate of the human heart. An insatiable thirst of praise is so far from being amiable, that it is hateful or contemptible.

4. In the last place, in order to real greatness, every attempt must be possible and rational, perhaps probable. Nothing is more common than to find persons, under the pretence of great and illustrious designs, prosecuting what is not of any value when obtained, and at the same time scarcely possible, and no way probable, to be obtained at all. This is declining altogether from the line of greatness, and going into the path of extravagance. Again, should any man undertake what he was altogether unable to perform, however excellent the design was in itself, we would not dignify it even with the name of ambition; he would acquire and deserve the character, not of greatness, but of folly or madness.

III. Show that magnanimity shines with the most perfect brightness as a Christian grace.

Let me briefly run over, and apply to religion, the above-mentioned ingredients of magnanimity.

1. It is to attempt great and difficult things. Religion calls us to the greatest and most noble attempts, whether in a private or public view. In a private view, it calls us to resist and subdue every corrupt and sinful passion, however strongly the indulgence is solicited by the tempting object, or recommended by the artful seducer. The importance and difficulty of this struggle appears not only from the holy scriptures, but from the experience and testimony of mankind in every age. What cautions are given by Solomon upon this subject! Prov. xvi. 32. But why should I extend this part of the subject? How few are successful in this attempt! This alone is a sufficient proof that it is great and difficult; and every person exercised to godliness will be abundantly sensible of it from the state of his own heart.

In a public view, every good man is called to live and act for the glory of God and the good of others. Here he has as extensive a scene of activity as he can possibly desire. He is not, indeed, permitted to glory, or to build an altar to his own vanity; but he is both permitted and obliged to exert his talents, to improve his time, to employ his substance, and to hazard his life in his Maker's service.

2. The truly pious man aspires after the greatest and most valuable possessions. He despises, indeed, the uncertain and the unsatisfying enjoyments of time: his desires after present enjoyments are subjected to the will of God. He has given them up without reserve, yet his heavenly Father knoweth that he hath need of these things; and therefore he both asks and hopes to receive what is suitable and necessary, and believes that the little that a just man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. But the glorious object of a Christian's ambition is the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The honourable relation he stands in to God as his adopted child in Christ Jesus, inclines and authorises him to hope for this purchased possession, and enables him to look down with becoming indifference on all the glory of this transitory world.

3. True piety encounters the greatest dangers with resolution. The fear of God is the only effectual mean to deliver us from the fear of man. Experience has abundantly shown that the servants of Christ have adhered to his cause, and made profession of his name, in opposition to all the terrors which infernal policy could present to them, and all the sufferings with which the most savage inhumanity could afflict them. But as this belongs to the case of persecution for conscience-sake, which by the peculiar kindness of Providence, is exceedingly rare among us, it is proper to observe, that every Christian has frequent opportunities of manifesting a holy resolution in encountering the reproach and derision of worldly men for adhering to his duty. And when we consider how hard it is to bear reproach and scorn, called, in scripture, "the trial of cruel mockings," Heb. xi. 36, there will appear to be no small measure of dignity and heroism in him who can calmly submit to it from every quarter rather than depart from his duty.

4. True piety perseveres with constancy in opposition to continued trial. This is indeed what distinguishes the Christian warfare from that of every other. It continues through life; and the last enemy to be overcome is death. In all the conflicts between men on earth, the issue may be speedily expected, and the reward immediately bestowed; but in religion, it is only he who shall endure to the end that shall be saved. This adds greatly to the difficulty, and seems to show, not only the excellence and beauty, but the real dignity and magnanimity of the Christian character.

5. In the last place, true piety endures suffering with patience and fortitude. If we reflect upon the number of suffering martyrs, whose testimonies are upon record, we shall see with what calmness and composure, with what undaunted firmness, and sometimes with what exultation and triumph they have gone to a scaffold, or been tied to a stake. Can any person, think you, who hath gone to the field of battle in quest of glory, or who hath braved the dangers of the seas in quest of

wealth or power, be once compared with those who have cheerfully given up their precious life, or submitted their bodies to the torture to keep their consciences undefiled? But, my brethren, Christian patience is much more frequently tried in another manner. The believer has made an unreserved surrender of himself and his all to the disposal of Providence: his faithfulness to this promise is brought almost every day to the trial. For the Christian, then, to suffer reproach, without rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; to be submissive under the loss of substance, and say with Job, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb," &c. Job i. 21. To yield up relations, and to say with David, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." 2 Sam. xii. 23. To look forward to approaching death, and say with the apostle Paul, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." 2 Tim. iv. 6. This is magnanimity indeed; this is the most solid glory which any child of Adam can possibly obtain.

IV. Make some practical improvement of what has been said.

1. You may learn, from what has been said, that whenever honour differs from conscience, it is a treacherous guide; wherever spirit, or dignity of mind, as a worldly virtue, differs from true religion, and even from the simplicity of the gospel, it is false and spurious. The gospel, it is true, will not suffer men to seek revenge, or to delight in it. It will humble them in the sight of God, and make them self-denied in the presence of men; yet it will constrain them not to refuse and duty to the one or any useful service to the other. It will not suffer them to be ambitious of higher places of honour and trust, but it will make them active and zealous in the duties of that place in which they already are. It will not suffer them to resent injuries and gratify revenge, but it will make them withstand a king upon his throne, if he presume to interfere in the matters of their God. What is there here that is not noble?

2. Suffer me to observe, that as a Christian magnanimity is more excellent than that of the world, it is also more practicable, and, in fact, more universal. Worldly magnanimity is what always requires such talents as do not fall to the lot of many, and such opportunities for its exercise as seldom occur. The road to heroism is not open to every man. But that magnanimity, which is the fruit of true religion, being indeed the product of divine grace, is a virtue of the heart, and may be attained by persons of mean talents and narrow possessions, and in the very lowest stations of human life. We see the heroic fortitude of the martyrs, as manifest in those of early years, and the weakest sex, as in any other; and whoever will visit the solitary walks of life, may find in the lowest stations, humility, thankfulness, patience under affliction, and submission to Providence; such as would do honour to the most approved virtue and the most enlightened mind. Thus the honour which is chiefly desirable, is equally open to the rich and to the poor, to the learned and to the unlearned, to the wise and to the unwise, as it cometh from God, who is no respecter of persons. One of the best and happiest effects of serious reflection is, to bring us, in a great measure, all upon a level; as indeed, in one most important respect—the magistrate with his robes, the scholar with his learning, and the day-labourer that

stands unnoticed—are all upon the same footing ; “ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”

OF

WISDOM, OR PRUDENCE.

The wisdom that cometh from above, &c.—James iii. 17.

“ I, WISDOM,” says Solomon, “ dwell with prudence :” hence wisdom and prudence, and the characters of wise and prudent, are often mentioned together. Prudence lies in wisely fixing upon a right end of all actions, and in wisely choosing the best means conducive to that end, and in using them at the best time, and in the properest manner : “ The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way ;” in divine and spiritual things, to understand the way of salvation, and the way of his duty, and how to glorify God. Concerning which may be inquired,

I. What spiritual wisdom is, as it is an internal grace, or inward disposition of the mind, respecting divine things ; a man’s duty, the salvation of his soul, and the glory of God. And,

1. It is, in general, grace in the heart : which is called “ wisdom in the hidden part.” Ps. li. 6. Prov. xvi. 21. This wisdom cometh from God, who gives it entrance, and puts it there : “ The Lord giveth wisdom.” Prov. ii. 6.

2. Spiritual wisdom in particular, is a right knowledge of a man’s self ; no man that is wise in his own eyes, and prudent in his own sight, knows himself ; “ there is more hope of a fool than of such.” A man that rightly knows himself, and is possessed of true wisdom, has knowledge of the sinfulness and plague of his own heart, and therefore will not trust in it : he knows his soul-sickness, his spiritual maladies and diseases, incurable by himself and others, excepting the great Physician Christ, to whom he only applies for healing : he knows his own poverty, and therefore seeks for true riches in Christ, &c.

3. True spiritual wisdom is no other than the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, which God commands to shine in the hearts of men. The true light of the saving knowledge of God is in Christ ; and as he has displayed his mercy and grace in him, and proclaimed his name in him, Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7, all the divine perfections shine most illustriously in Christ, “ the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person ;” and in the great work of redemption and salvation by him : and true wisdom lies in the knowledge of this.

4. True spiritual wisdom is no other than the fear of the Lord : both David and Solomon say, “ that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Ps. cxi. 10. Prov. ix. 10. But Job, earlier than them both, says, “ the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom ; and to depart from evil is understanding.” Job xxviii. 28. This includes the whole worship of God, internal and external, flowing from a principle of grace ; it takes

in the whole duty of man, which it is his wisdom to practise, internally and externally.

5. It is being wise unto salvation, or in things respecting that. The scriptures are said to be able to make a man wise unto salvation, 2 Tim. iii. 15, and he is a wise man indeed, who is thus made wise.

II. Wherein this wisdom practically shows itself.

1. In doing good things in general. Such who are wickedly wise are wise to do evil; but such who are spiritually wise, are "wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil;" Rom. xvi. 19; and these are capable of doing things both for their own good and for the good of others. They may do good for themselves. "He that is wise may be profitable to himself;" Job xxii. 2. Prov. ix. 12; and such wise persons may, by what they do, be useful to others; and therefore believers in God are exhorted to maintain good works, because they are good and profitable to men, both because of example and because of real benefit to them. Besides, what a wise man does, and in doing which he shows his wisdom, may be for the honour of religion, to stop the mouths of gainsayers. They may and do adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, and recommend it to others; and by their works shining before men, be the means of glorifying God, and even of winning souls to God by their good conversation.

2. This spiritual wisdom shows itself in particular in a profession of religion. The kingdom of heaven, or the outward gospel-church state, is compared to ten virgins; five of them were wise, and five were foolish; but the wise virgins not only took the lamp of profession, but were concerned to have the oil of grace in their vessels with their lamps, and so continued burning till the bridegroom's coming; and in this they showed their wisdom.

3. This spiritual wisdom shows itself in a becoming walk and conversation; in a conversation that is ordered aright, according to the rule of the word of God, and is becoming and ornamental to the gospel of Christ: it appears when a man walks circumspectly, with his eyes about him; with his eyes in his head, as the wise man's are, looking well to his going; to his steps, as the prudent man does; his eyes looking right on, and his eyelids right before him, pondering the path of his feet, and neither turning to the right hand nor to the left; when he walks in wisdom towards them that are without, as well as in peace and love towards them that are within; and is careful to give no offence to Jew nor Gentile, nor to the church of Christ.

4. This wisdom shows itself in observing the providence of God in the world, and the dispensations of it: in making useful remarks upon it, and in learning useful lessons from it: "Who so is wise, and will observe these things," things in providence, before related, "even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." Ps. cxvii. 43. And it shows wisdom to understand both the ways of God in his providence, and the ways and methods of God in his grace, and the ways he has prescribed his people to walk in. Hos. xiv. 9.

5. This spiritual wisdom shows itself in a man's concern about his last end and future state; how it will be with him at last, and how it will go with him in another world: Deut. xxxii. 29; how near it is; what

that may issue in : that they may be ready for death, come when it will, and for an eternal world. The next thing to be inquired into is,

III. From whence this spiritual wisdom comes. It is a question put by Job, "Whence cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding?" The answer to it is, "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof," Job xxviii. 20—23, for it is with him originally, and in full perfection, yea it is in him infinite, unsearchable : it is in his gift to bestow, and is to be asked of him, "that giveth to all men liberally," freely, richly, and bountifully, as they need, "and upbraideth not" with former folly, ingratitude, and misimprovement of what they have received. James i. 5.

God is the efficient cause of it ; God, Father, Son, and Spirit. It is a good and perfect gift, which is from above, and comes from the Father of lights. It comes from Christ, who is the only wise God and our Saviour ; the wisdom of God, who is counsel and sound wisdom, and who is made to us wisdom ; on whom the spirit of wisdom rests, and in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ; and it is by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The means of this wisdom, and of promoting and increasing it, are the word of God, the ministers of it, and good men conversed with. The scriptures read and explained, when under a divine influence, and accompanied with a divine power, are able to make wise unto salvation : they are written for our learning ; and the ministers of the gospel, who show unto men the way of salvation, and win souls to Christ, are wise and make wise ; and conversation with wise and good men is a mean of increasing wisdom. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." Prov. xiii. 20.

IV. The nature and properties of this wisdom ; a full account of which is given in our text.

1. It is from above ; from God, Father, Son, and Spirit, as before observed : it is conversant about heavenly things : it is celestial wisdom, and stands opposed to earthly wisdom in a preceding verse ; wisdom about earthly things, the wisdom of this world, and the princes of it, that come to nought.

2. It is pure in itself and in its effects : it is productive of purity of heart, life, and conversation ; the effect of it is pure and undefiled religion, and the observance of it ; those who have it, hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, and are obedient to the divine precepts, out of a pure heart and faith unfeigned : it is opposed to that wisdom which is sensual.

3. It is peaceable : it influences the professors of it to be at peace among themselves, and with one another ; and to live peaceably, as much as possible, with all men ; and to cultivate peace in families, among neighbours, and even with enemies.

4. It is said to be gentle : it makes those who have it to be gentle towards all men, moderate and humane, to bear the infirmities of the weak, to forbear and forgive one another injuries done ; and, for the sake of peace and love, to recede from their just right, and not bear hard on others for their failings, but cover them with the mantle of love.

5. It is easy to be entreated, or persuaded, to put up with affronts, to

condescend to men of low estate, and not mind high things; for with the lowly is wisdom; to yield easily to the superior judgment and stronger reasonings of others; to be readily inclined and induced to hope and believe the best of all men; and to entertain a good opinion of good men and their conduct.

6. It is full of mercy and good fruits: it fills men with compassion to those in distress, and puts them upon acts of beneficence to the poor, according to their ability.

7. It is without partiality; without partiality to themselves, esteeming others better than themselves; and to others, showing no respect of persons, making no difference in Christian fellowship between rich and poor, and giving to the poor and needy without distinction, favour, and affection.

8. It is without hypocrisy to God and man, not making a show of what they have not, and intend not to do: as it is a grace, it has a close connexion with faith unfeigned, with a hope that is without hypocrisy, and with love which is without dissimulation. All which shows how useful and desirable such wisdom is, and how necessary throughout the conduct of a Christian life, to do his duty, to avoid the snares and temptations he is liable to, to seek his own good, and the good of others; and, above all, the glory of God.

OF COMMUNION WITH GOD.

Our fellowship is with the Father, &c.—1 John i. 3.

COMMUNION with God is the top of the saint's experience in this life: it is the height of experimental religion and powerful godliness. This, of all the enjoyments of God's people on earth, is the nearest to the heavenly bliss.

I. Communion with God, in general, which appears chiefly in a large communication of grace, and the blessings of it from him conveyed through Christ, and applied by the blessed Spirit.

1. Communion is founded in union, and arises from it.

There is an union between God and his people; for the more open manifestation and evidence of which our Lord prays, John xvii. 21. It is a conjugal union between them, as between husband and wife. Isa. liv. 5. The evidence of which union is the gift of the Spirit to them in regeneration and conversion; when there appears to be a vital union and a mutual inhabitation of God in them, and of them in God. 1 John iv. 13. The bond of this union is the love of God to them. As it is the love of one to another which knits their souls together; as the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2. The grand blessing of grace from this union, is covenant-interest in God, than which there cannot be a greater blessing: "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord!" He that is our God, is the God of our salvation; of all the blessings of it, of all the spiritual blessings saints are

blessed with in Christ, and of all grace from him, and all the supplies of it. Eph. i. 3. Phil. iv. 19. Now in the perception and enjoyment of this grand blessing, covenant-interest in God, communion with him greatly lies. God sometimes says to his people, even when they are fearing and doubting, "Be not dismayed, for I am thy God;" and they, in the exercise of faith, say as David, Ps. xxxi. 14. They avouch the Lord to be their God, and he avouches them to be his peculiar people: Zech. xiii. 9; and, when this is the case, sensible communion with God must be enjoyed: the Lord is the portion of his people. And when he says to them, as he did to Abraham, Gen. xv. 1, and they in return say, Lam. iii. 24. Under such a discovery, and in such a view of things, there must be communion with God; they have a mutual interest in each other: the Lord's people is his portion, and he himself is the portion of Jacob; and therefore, with great propriety may they be said to be heirs of God: an amazing phrase: expressive of property, interest, and fellowship. Hence,

3. There is a mutual intercourse between God and his people, which is variously expressed in scripture.

By their mutual indwelling in each other; and God not only dwells in particular congregated churches of Christ, who are built up an habitation for God through the Spirit, such as were the churches at Corinth and at Ephesus, 2 Cor. vi. 16. Eph. ii. 22, but in particular persons, who love Christ and keep his commandments; of whom he says, "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John xiv. 23. And, on the other hand, such dwell in God, Ps. xc. 1, who live in the continual exercise of grace upon him; and particularly of the grace of love towards him, and towards his people. 1 John iv. 16. This is communion.

By a mutual walking together; which shows agreement, and is expressive of fellowship: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" God and his people are agreed. Rom. v. 10. God walked with the children of Israel in a tent and in a tabernacle, which moved from place to place; and he walks in the midst of his golden candlesticks, particular churches, as he has promised: "I will dwell in them, and walk in them;" and so in individual believers, 2 Cor. vi. 16, and they walk with him: thus Enoch walked with God, as did Noah and others, as do all believers; in which they have much communion with him.

By a mutual converse together: they talk together, God speaks to them, and they speak to him. Such familiar fellowship had Abraham with God, about the affair of Sodom, which, when over, it is said, he left communing with him; and such had Moses also, with whom God is said to commune, to talk with him, and to speak to him face to face; and something similar to this is the experience of all the saints, when the Lord appears unto them, and talks with them, when he visits them, and discloses the secrets of his heart unto them, and they talk with him and speak to him in prayer: they have access to him through Christ, and that with freedom and boldness.

By a mutual sitting down and feasting together. The table on which the show-bread, or bread of faces, was set, was typical of the saints' communion with God, and the enjoyment of his presence, through the

mediation of Christ : so was the meat offering, part of which was burnt for a savour, a memorial of it to the Lord, and the rest was eaten by Aaron and his sons. God has spread a table for his people, and made a feast of fat things for them on his holy mountain.

II. Who the persons are who have communion with God.

Not unregenerate men, such who are in a state of nature ; for they are in a state of alienation from the life of God ; they are at a distance from him, their sins separate between God and them. They walk in darkness : and what communion hath light with darkness ? No unholy and unrighteous persons have communion with God : for “ what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? ” as not righteous men with unrighteous men in a church-state, so not a pure, holy and righteous God, with impure and unsanctified sinners ; but such only who are regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God, for this is necessary to communion with God : “ without holiness no man shall see the Lord,” enjoy him, and have fellowship with him, neither now nor hereafter. The gift of the Spirit as a Spirit of sanctification, and the operations of his grace on the hearts of men, are the great evidence of union to God, whence flows communion with him.

III. The especial fellowship which such persons have with the Father, Son, and Spirit distinctly ; the apostle John says, it is “ with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ ; ” 1 John i. 3 ; to which may be added, Phil. ii. 1, “ If any fellowship of the Spirit ; ” and also, 2 Cor. xiii. 14, “ The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” All which put together, show that the saints have a communion with each person in the Godhead.

1. With God the Father, as he is the Father of Christ ; who, as such, has blessed them with all spiritual blessings in Christ ; and as such, has chosen them in him to holiness and happiness ; and as such, regenerates them according to his abundant mercy ; and is the Father of mercies, and the God of all grace and comfort to them : and, as he is their covenant God and Father in Christ, through whom they have access to him as their Father, and address him as their Father in heaven, and call upon him for what they want : and, under the witnessings of the Spirit of adoption, cry, “ Abba, Father : ” and say, “ doubtless thou art our Father : ” and then they may be said to have communion with him as such, when their faith and hope are exercised on him ; and they are affected with his wondrous love in taking them into his family, and putting them among the children ; 1 John iii. 1 ; and, when they are sensible of the feelings of his heart for them, under their afflictions, temptations, trials, and exercises, Isa. lxiii. 9 ; Ps. ciii. 13, then they have fellowship with the Father.

2. With Christ : fellowship with him is what they are particularly called unto, 1 Cor. i. 9, and what Christ himself invites them to, Cant. iv. 8, and which lies,—1. On his part, in a communication of grace, unto them, which they receive at his hands ; he is full of grace, all fulness of it dwells in him, and out of his fulness they receive.—2. On their part, this fellowship lies, in the exercise of grace upon Christ ; in the goings forth of their souls to him in acts of faith, hope, love, joy, &c. Upon his person, as the Son of God, beholding his glory as the Father

the only begotten of the Father, and the express image of his person : upon him, as considered in his offices of Prophet, Priest, and King. They have communion with him as their Prophet, who teaches them by his Spirit, word, and ordinances ; and from whom they receive that anointing which teacheth all things : to him they hearken as the great Prophet of the church, embrace the doctrines of his gospel, and pay a regard to all the instructions of his lips, and in whose hearts the word of Christ dwells richly : with him, in his priestly office, they have to do with his blood for the remission of their sins, and the cleansing of their souls ; and with his righteousness for their justification before God, and acceptance with him : they make use of him as their advocate and intercessor, with the Father, and put their petitions into his hands, to be offered up by him, perfumed with the incense of his mediation : they acknowledge him as their King, submit to his government, yield obedience to his commands, and esteem all his precepts concerning all things to be right. Saints have such communion and fellowship with Christ in his offices, that they have, in some sense, a share in them ; that is, they are made by him prophets, priests, and kings ; prophets to teach and instruct others, having received the anointing from him ; and kings and priests unto God and his Father. 1 John ii. 27. Rev. i. 6. Much of fellowship with Christ is enjoyed in the use of, and by the means of the ordinances of his house. The church is a banqueting house, into which Christ brings his people, where they sit under his shadow and in his presence with delight, and his banner over them is his love displayed ; here he has a table spread, and at it he himself sits, and welcomes his guests, saying, "Eat, O friends ! drink abundantly, O beloved !"

Now, this communion with Christ greatly arises from the saints' relation to him : he is the husband of his church and people, and they are his spouse and bride ; hence a communion both of name and goods ; they have the same common name, Jer. xxiii. 6 ; xxxiii. 16 ; and all that Christ has is theirs, they being Christ's and he theirs : he is made to them "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Christ is the head, to which his body, the church, are joined, and the saints are members of him, and one Spirit with him ; from whom they receive life and nourishment, and increase with the increase of God : he is the vine, they the branches : and by virtue of union to him, a communication of the fruits of grace and holiness.

3. Saints have also a special and particular communion with the Holy Ghost, in the gifts of his grace unto them, and which they exercise under his influence ; as the grace of faith, which is of his operation, and from whence he is called the Spirit of faith ; and good hope through grace, in the exercise of which believers abound, through the power of the Holy Ghost ; and love is a fruit of the Spirit, and which is under his cultivation. Moreover, this fellowship of the Spirit appears in the offices of grace, which he performs towards them, as the guide, teacher, and comforter of them : as a Spirit of grace and supplication, making intercession in them : as a Spirit of adoption, witnessing to their spirits that they are the children of God ; and as the earnest of the heavenly inheritance to them, and the sealer of them unto the day of redemption : in whom he dwells, as in his temple, enabling them to exercise every

grace and perform every duty, working in them, for that self-same thing, eternal glory and happiness.

IV. The properties of it; showing the excellency of this communion and fellowship.

1. It is a wonderful instance of condescension in God, that he who is the high and lofty One, who dwells in heaven, the high and holy place, and yet with such also who are of a contrite and humble spirit; that he whose throne the heaven is, and the earth his footstool, and yet condescends to dwell with men on earth.

2. It is very honourable to the sons of men to be favoured with such communion: if it was an honour to Mephibosheth to sit at the table of king David, as one of the king's sons; or for an Haman to be invited to a banquet with the King and queen; how infinitely more honourable is it to be admitted to sit with the King of kings at his table, and to be entertained by him as royal guests!

3. This is a privilege very desirable, nothing more so; this is the one thing saints are desirous of in public worship, to behold the beauty of the Lord.

4. It is exceedingly valuable; it is beyond all the enjoyments of life, preferable to every thing that can be had on earth: the light of God's countenance, his gracious presence, communion with him, put more joy and gladness into the hearts of his people, than the greatest increase of worldly things: it is this which makes wisdom's ways ways of pleasantness, and her paths paths of peace: it is this which makes the tabernacle of God amiable and lovely, and a day in his house better than a thousand elsewhere; and because so valuable, hence the apostle John, in an exulting manner, says, "Truly, our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

THE

OBJECT AND NATURE OF TRUE PRAYER.

And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, &c.—Matt. xxi. 22.

PRAYER is not only an important, but it is also a very large and comprehensive subject; and in one form or another, meets the eye of him who converses much with his Bible, more frequently than any other part of religion.

I. The object of prayer.

It is an unspeakable mercy to us that we are not left, in our inquiries upon this point, to the dim light of natural reason, like the poor heathen. Ps. cxv. 4—8. 1 Cor. i. 21. But we are favoured with the holy scriptures, in which we have not only a revelation of the nature and perfections of God, but also the most explicit directions concerning the manner in which he will be worshipped. John iv. 24. It is, therefore, of great importance that we should have just and scriptural notions of the object of prayer, otherwise we may offer "strange fire before the Lord," as did Nadab and Abihu. Lev. x. 1, 2. That which is spoken of the word, Deut. iv. 2, may be accommodated to the object of prayer.

The object of prayer set before us in the sacred volume, is the one living and true God, the God from whom the church receives all its salvation : of this God, and of this salvation, the apostle speaks, 1 Pet. i. 2.

The holy Trinity are sometimes addressed in prayer jointly, as when the apostle prays for the church at Corinth. 2 Cor. xiii. 14. Sometimes the Father and the Son are only prayed to, as in 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.

In various places in Scripture, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are prayed to separately ; but the most ordinary and proper mode to be adopted in prayer, is to address the Father, in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ, depending on the Spirit to help our infirmities. Eph. ii. 18.

He that believes and asserts this doctrine, must be content to pass for a fool, in the estimation of those who exalt their own reason above revelation. Acts xxiv. 14.

II. Of the nature of prayer. There are few, if any, definitions of prayer more concise or scriptural than that of the Assembly of Divines, in their Shorter Catechism : "Prayer is an offering up of our desires to God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ." I shall make this definition the ground of this head of discourse.

1. It is the offering up of our desires to God ; it is the unfeigned language of the heart ; and there is no true prayer, where there is only a repetition of words. Matt. xv. 8. To such persons God says, "When ye spread forth your hands." Isa. i. 15. Every real Christian knows experimentally the difference between the prayer of the lip and that of the heart. When the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, and sheweth the things of Christ, then the Christian begins to hunger and thirst after the bread and water of life ; he becomes an importunate suppliant, and cries to, and wrestles with God. Gen. xxxii. 26. Matt. xv. 22, 25, 28.

2. It is essential to the nature of true prayer, that what we ask should be according to the Divine will. We are liable in our prayers to be governed more by a regard to our own ease, interest, and inclinations, than by either a concern for the glory of God, or the prosperity of our own souls. Lot was governed by his inclination more than his judgment and conscience, both when he chose the plains of Sodom for his residence, though its inhabitants were so intolerably wicked, and when he desired Zoar for the place of his refuge, after the Lord had brought him out of that devoted country. Gen. xiii. 10, and chap. xix. 19, 20. Elijah's prayer was in conformity to the rule of which we are speaking. 1 Kings xix. 4. The same spirit pervaded the language of that peevish and rebellious prophet Jonah, iv. 8. Both these instances furnish us with proof that even good men may pray in their own spirit, and have a greater regard to their own will than to that of their heavenly Father. How different the spirit and rule of their petitions, to that of the apostle ! Phil. i. 23. The good man's language should uniformly be this : "All the days," &c. Job xiv. 14.

Wicked men in their prayers are uniformly governed more by their own corrupt inclinations, than by the will of God. Ps. lxxviii. 29—31.

Some pray to God with a view to make him a party in their worldly and carnal conflicts. Such was the prayer presented to our Lord. Luke

xii. 13. Such have been the supplications which whole nations have presented to God on their days of fasting and prayer. Such were also the prayers of some professors in the time of the apostle. James iv. 3. If wicked men pray under this unholy disposition, God either will not grant their request, or he will answer them in anger, as he did Balaam. Num. xxii. 20, &c. If the children of God should ever be influenced by this temper of mind, God has too great a regard to his own glory, and their good, to give them according to their petition; he will answer them according to the love he bears them. 2 Cor. xii. 7—9. So that God's denials and God's bestowments are alike gracious.

When a believer is in a right frame, the preface of his prayer is, "Thy will be done." The will of God is revealed in the scriptures. Let us then study and search them. Rom. xii. 2. And if we attain to an acquaintance with the mind and will of God, we may take the full encouragement of that beautiful and comprehensive promise, John xv. 7.

We pray according to the will of God, when we pray for that which tends to glorify God; at this we should aim in every thing. This was the grand end which Elijah proposed in his prayer. 1 Kings xviii. 37.

We pray according to the will of God, when we are more earnest for wisdom and grace, than to be rich and great. We have a fine example of this in Solomon. 1 Kings iii. 5, 7—10. And whoever is enabled to pray by this rule, and in this spirit, may, with some propriety, use the strong and consolatory language of 1 John v. 14.

3. It enters very materially into the nature of true prayer, that we should ask all in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ. John xiv. 14. As sinners, we have forfeited all right, either to temporal or spiritual blessings: we can therefore neither ask nor receive any thing at the hand of God but as a matter of favour. The seat which he is described as occupying in the church, and from which he communes with his people, is "the mercy-seat." Exod. xxv. 22. It is "the throne of his grace." Heb. iv. 16.

Jesus Christ by his death opened the way of access to the throne of grace. Heb. x. 19—22.

All the blessings which are sought in prayer are treasured up in Christ and communicated to us through him. Eph. i. 3. John i. 16. Phil. iv. 19.

It is the express law of divine revelation, that whoever approaches the throne of grace in prayer, should come in the name, and depend on the merit of Jesus Christ. It is upon this very ground that our Lord teaches his disciples to expect an answer to their prayers. John xvi. 23.

III. The obligations men are under to pray to God, especially those who are favoured with divine revelation. It is a duty which naturally results from the relation God stands in to men, as their creator and benefactor. Acts xvii. 28. James i. 17.

1. It becomes our duty, from the express manner in which it is enjoined upon us in his holy word. Ezek. xxxvi. 37. Christ described the nature and extent of this duty. Luke xviii. 1. Nor is it merely of good men that we say, they ought to pray. Acts viii. 22. James iv. 8.

2. Again, our obligation to prayer results from our circumstances and characters. In whatever light we consider ourselves, whether as crea-

tures, as sinners, or as Christians, there is need of much prayer. As creatures, we are weak and frail, 1 Cor. xv. 31; and as sinners, we are, in a spiritual sense, wretched, Rev. iii. 17. And if through grace we have been made Christians, we shall feel a continual obligation to prayer, arising out of the multitude of our wants, the strength and zeal of our spiritual enemies, together with innumerable afflictions to bear, and great duties to perform. Hence, we may discern the necessity of daily adopting such language as Matt. vi. 12, 13.

3. Our obligation to prayer may be inferred from the example of Christ, who being in his human nature inferior and subject to his Father, is represented as incessantly occupied in prayer to him. Ps. ii. 8. Elsewhere it is said, that he "offered up prayers and supplications," &c. Heb. v. 7. Being therefore under a continual obligation to prayer, we are made like unto our living and glorious Head in the days of his humiliation.

IV. In the duty of prayer, there is nothing of more importance than faith; Christ therefore particularly mentions it in this text.

1. Faith is a grace of high importance in the Christian religion: it has an extensive and active part assigned it in every part thereof, but especially in the believer's devotional exercises. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing." The importance of faith in our approach to God, is strongly marked, Heb. xi. 6. There is much truth in that remark of the Jews, though it was applied to a bad purpose, John ix. 31. When the apostle is recommending prayer, and holding forth the encouragement arising from the Divine liberality, he says of the person praying, "But let him ask in faith." James i. 5—7. Our remarks upon this head are elucidated and confirmed by the history of Cain and Abel. Gen. iv. 3—5. See the New Testament comment upon this passage, Heb. xi. 4.

2. The scriptures are full of matter tending to encourage our souls, and to enlarge and strengthen the actings of faith in our approaches to God in prayer.

3. Sometimes faith grounds its encouragement upon the ability of God. Eph. iii. 20. If unbelief starts a difficulty, and says, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" Ps. lxxviii. 19; faith calculating upon the omnipotence of God, replies, Phil. iv. 19. Strong faith in prayer is excited in the believer's soul by a consideration of the relation God stands in to him. He is his God and Father. Matt. vi. 9. And when the prodigal finally resolved to arise and seek salvation, his language ran thus: "I will arise and go to my Father." Luke xv. 18, 19. His reception far exceeds all his expectations, verse 20. In like manner Old Testament saints encouraged themselves in approaching God.

4. Faith is nourished by the covenant engagements of God, which are unalterable. Ps. lxxxix. 34.

5. Once more. The Christian has strong ground for faith in prayer, in those many great and precious promises with which the scriptures abound. Matt. vii. 7. Nor is he encouraged only by such general promises as these, but there are promises suited to all the variety of circumstances into which he can possibly come.

6. There is also much encouragement for faith in prayer, from the

doctrine of Divine Providence. Ps. xxxix. 12. There is a similar description of God's special regard to his church in 2 Chron. vii. 15. Lastly: The strongest ground of faith in our access to the Father, is the Redeemer's mediation, in his death, resurrection, and appearance in heaven for us, together with the Holy Spirit's intercession within us. We shall close with an observation or two by way of improvement; and,

1. To you who live totally without prayer. You lie down at night, rise up in the morning, and pass through the day, without ever bowing your knee to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You virtually renounce all idea of obligation to, and dependence upon God. Yours is, indeed, an awful state, and is accurately drawn by the pencil of truth. Ps. x. 4—6. Dream not, poor sinner, that thy false confidence will be always equally strong, or thy conscience equally tranquil: no, the day of affliction and darkness may soon approach; the day of death must come, and it may come both soon and suddenly. Isa. x. 3. Will your prayerless soul, think you, then, despise God, salvation, and heaven? Justly may the Lord then say to you, Jer. ii. 28.

2. To those who make a conscience of paying homage to God in prayer, but whose prayers are mere lip-service, nothing more than pharisaic devotions, which spring from a self-righteous spirit, and are directed to an end which they never can attain; namely, that of procuring the remission of sins and an entrance to eternal glory. They are so defective and erroneous in every respect, that they might, without much impropriety, have that sentence inscribed upon them. Acts xvii. 23. Such persons know not God spiritually or savingly. Jer. ix. 3.

3. Let me remind you, Christians, what obligations you are under to the word of God, in which the object of prayer is revealed, and encouragements to prayer held forth in almost every page: how much you owe for the success of all your prayers to the prevalent intercession of Christ, and the divine aid of the Holy Spirit. And be sure, whilst you are praying for spiritual blessings, use all the means by which God has been accustomed to convey them; and be constantly looking for that blessed day, when you shall feel no more spiritual wants, but have prayer changed into everlasting praise.

PUBLIC PRAYER.

And let these my words, wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, &c.—1 Kings viii. 59.

NOTWITHSTANDING those sacred books which were written previous to the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh, were written in the infancy of the church, yet they abound with interesting and instructive passages, calculated with the Divine blessing, to increase our knowledge and inflame our devotion. There are few, if any, chapters in the Old Testament, more suited to promote these objects, than that from which I have read my text, containing the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of

the temple, one of the most spacious and splendid monuments the art and labour of man ever produced. This noble building, in the erection of which the king of Israel spared neither cost nor labour, was designed to be a type and figure of that glorious church which Jesus, the true Solomon, the King of Peace, was appointed to raise out of the ruins of our fallen world; and of which the Prophet speaks, Zech. vi. 12, 13.

In past times the Lord had a tabernacle among his people, in which was placed the ark of the covenant, which ark was a symbol of Jehovah's presence with his people. To this tabernacle the tribes of Israel were accustomed to draw near, and there offer, upon God's altar, both bloody sacrifices and devout supplications. It was reserved for David, the man after God's own heart, to propose, plan, and diligently prepare to build a magnificent house for the worship of the one living and true God. The way in which his mind was first impressed upon the subject, and what God said to him concerning it, are related 1 Chron. xvii. 1—4, 11, 12.

No sooner is David gone to his fathers in peace, than Solomon hastens to fulfil the favourite design of his father.

The very liberal contribution which had been made in the days of his father greatly facilitated this arduous and honourable undertaking. The thousands of Israel, with cheerful hearts, hastened from all parts of the kingdom to witness the public and solemn dedication of the temple to God.

What an interesting spectacle does the congregation of Israel present, upon this truly memorable occasion! From the text I intend to draw some general observations upon public prayer.

Obs. I.—Public prayer is both an ancient and important branch of divine worship. It was a part of the patriarchal worship: it was so even among that generation to whom God at first revealed himself as a God of grace, through the seed of the woman, who was to "bruise the serpent's head." Gen. iv. 26.

Public prayer was a part of the worship which God instituted among the Jews in the wilderness, and was offered at the door of the tabernacle, before that propitiatory, which was a beautiful type of Jesus Christ, who is said to be "the propitiation for our sins," 1 John ii. 2, and by whom alone we have freedom of access to God at a throne of grace. Nor are we at a loss for the precise period when the whole congregation used to occupy themselves in this holy practice. Luke i. 10. It would have been highly criminal in them to have neglected the assembling of themselves together at the place where God had recorded his holy name, after that solemn declaration. Ex. xxix. 43. It is from the circumstance of the congregation of Israel having fellowship with God in prayer, that Moses congratulates them. Deut. iv. 7.

I hardly need remind you, that it was a part of the temple service. From this interesting part of religion the temple was denominated "a house of prayer." Isa. lvi. 7. Here, as soon as the congregation were assembled, and the priests had brought up the ark of the Lord into its place, Solomon became a mouth for Israel to God; and mightily did the Spirit of prayer rest upon him, when, in the words of the text, he

pleaded with God, "words wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, that he maintain the cause of his servant, and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require." In the very worst days of the Jewish church, they still paid some respect to the instituted service of God, and called upon his holy name in prayer, which made the prophet address them in the name of the Lord. Isa. i. 13—15.

We have another proof of this remark. Isa. lviii. 2, 3. Thus we perceive they kept up public devotions, and especially prayer, even when they were totally estranged from the purity and power of religion.

Jesus Christ recommended public prayer in the church both by his example and instructions: he did the former, when, after his farewell sermon, contained in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of the gospel of John, he concluded with a most devout and heavenly prayer for the safety, unity, and prosperity of his church, which is given at full length in John xvii. and he did the latter in that encouraging promise, Matt. xviii. 20. And the disciples attended both to the letter and spirit of their Master's direction: for when he was taken from them they were in prayer themselves, and also initiated those whom the Lord called by their ministry into the same practice, as appears by Acts ii. 41, 42.

Finally. Public prayer is a reasonable, a scriptural, and a profitable service; since in the place, and among the people, where the holy incense of prayer is offered upon Jehovah's altar, he hath said, "I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Ex. xx. 24. This accounts for the ardent language of David, when, for a season, he was precluded attendance upon the worship of God's house. Ps. lxiii. 1, 2. He expresses himself in like manner upon public prayer. Ps. xxvii. 4. Seasons of public prayer must be ever precious to the godly man, if he believe the declaration of the same writer. Ps. lxxv. 4.

Admitting public prayer to be an essential and important part of divine worship, in the discharge of this duty we must not be governed by our own fancy, inclination, and prejudice, but by the word of God.

Obs. II.—There is reason to think that, when Solomon put up this solemn prayer to God, the whole congregation of Israel were assembled together. The design of this observation is to reprove that evil, but too prevalent practice, of either coming after the prayer is over, or while it is offering, to the great interruption of the devotion of others.

The coming into the house of God either in or after the time of prayer, indicates something wrong in the temper and conduct of professing Christians. It should seem that their hearts are not duly apprised of the excellency and importance of the privilege about to be enjoyed. When the mind of the good man is rightly disposed towards the house and worship of God, his language will be that of David. Ps. lxxxiv. 2. The time of returning to the place where the Lord has manifested his glory, and dispensed his grace to the soul, will be anticipated with pleasure, and the hours of delay be counted almost with impatience. Remember, Christian, that this is the established law of the house of God, "let all things be done decently, and in order." 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

Obs. III.—The prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple was an extempore prayer. Few questions have been agitated with more

warmth among protestants and real Christians, than that which relates to written and extempore prayer.

The chief rule of direction upon this subject for the Christian church is the authority and example of Christ, as placed before his disciples, and by them transmitted to the churches, which, through the blessing of God, they were instrumental in gathering. The disciples asked Christ to teach them to pray, and he gave them what is called the Lord's Prayer; not so much to be used by them as a form, but rather as a rule to direct them and the Christian church in general, as to the materials of which their prayers should be composed, and the spirit in which they should be offered. The instruction of Christ upon this subject is best illustrated by his own example: the supplications which he offered to his Father were of the description for which we are pleading. We have an account of some short ejaculatory prayers of Christ in Matt. xi. 25, 26, and Luke xxii. 41, 42: and also of a larger and more public prayer offered for his church and people, and given more at length, in the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel. All these were uttered out of the abundance of the heart, by a special aid of the Holy Spirit.

If we look to the authority and example of the apostles, every thing there is in favour of extempore prayer; for we know of no forms of prayer either enjoined or used by them.

1. Extempore prayer leaves the greatest scope for devout exercise of the heart.

2. It leaves the greatest room for the agency of the Holy Spirit, from whom real Christians, when in prayer, often derive such freedom of expression, and such strong faith to believe the promises, as constrain them to say, "This is the finger of God." Ex. viii. 19. But the great matter is, to pray with the heart, to pray in faith: and of those that pray in this manner, whether with or without a form, "peace be on them."

Obs. IV.—In Solomon's address to God, there is a pleasing union of the grace and gift of prayer.

The gift and the grace of prayer are distinct things in their nature, and are often separated from each other. 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3. May it be our happiness to answer fully an opposite description! 1 Pet. ii. 5.

Obs. V.—It was a suitable and appropriate prayer. It deserves this character, because in this prayer Solomon exhibits a truly devotional spirit; asks for things highly requisite for himself and his people; and exemplifies his own maxim by expressing the whole in "acceptable words." Eccl. xii. 10.

The suitableness of Solomon's prayer will appear, if we consider the branches of which it is composed.

1. As it is a prayer for the Jewish nation, that their peace and prosperity might be abundant and permanent: Jerusalem was the city the Lord had *chosen*; verse 44; and respecting the nation itself, he reminds God of the relation it stood in to him, and the wonderful things which he had done for it, verses 51, 53. In praying for the Jews, he also puts God in remembrance of his covenant and promise. Verses 23, 24.

2. It is suitable, as it is a prayer for the church. In this view of it, we shall find many instructive considerations. He confesses the awful mixture of good and bad men in the church. Verse 32. But notwith-

standing the Lord may thus suffer mere professors long to mingle with the saints, having said, "Let both grow together," Matt. xiii. 30, the time draws nigh, when Jesus, the great Head of the church, shall completely accomplish what his forerunner says to him. Matt. iii. 12.

The principal subject of his prayer for the church is the forgiveness of sin. The value of this blessing, and the way in which it was to be obtained, were well known in the Old Testament, and are beautifully expressed by David, Ps. xxxii. 1, 2. Solomon was well acquainted with the description of people, who ultimately embrace and walk in the comfort of this delightful truth, even those, "which shall know every man the plague of his own heart." Verse 38. Jesus Christ united in one great promise those two branches of spiritual good. John xvi. 8, 14. Those to whom the Holy Ghost makes this gracious discovery will unite with Solomon. Verse 58.

3. In this prayer Solomon is led to pray for the gentiles which may be proselyted to the Jewish faith. Verses 41—43. The conversion of the heathens from their idols to the knowledge and worship of the true God, was the subject of God's eternal purpose. Ps. ii. 8. And it was the subject of divine revelation in the patriarchal, prophetic, and apostolic ages. Gen. xxii. 18. Isa. xliii. 6; xlii. 4; lii. 10. The New Testament explains and confirms all these predictions: Christ gave his disciples command, Mark xvi. 15. His death embraced this desirable object; for the apostle Paul gives a description of it, Eph. ii. 13, 14. The first-fruits of this glorious harvest have long since been presented to God. Ps. lxxii. 19.

Obs. VI.—This prayer was heard and answered. This might naturally be expected from the character of him to whom it was addressed, a God "that heareth prayer," Ps. lxv. 2, and from the complexion of the prayer itself; for it had all the properties of genuine heart-prayer, the prayer of faith which prevails with God. 2 Chron. vii. 1. These were gracious tokens of acceptance. Our temples, our sacrifices, resemble not Solomon's: of course, we cannot have similar expressions of the acceptance of our prayers; but if we worship in the assembly of the saints with true spiritual worship, there is a glory revealed in the house which the eyes of our minds can perceive, and there is a fire which descends upon the altar of the Christian's heart, even that fire which made the hearts of the two disciples burn within them while Christ talked with them by the way, and opened to them the scriptures. Luke xxiv. 32. There were not only some outward tokens of acceptance, but "the Lord appeared unto Solomon." 2 Chron. vii. 12. Christians have no ground to expect a voice from heaven to say that their prayers are heard and accepted; but the Holy Spirit supplies this deficiency by dwelling in them, and bringing home to their minds the evidence of this truth, by a sweet sense of the forgiveness of sin, great nearness to God in ordinances, and an abundance of heavenly joy and peace, accompanied by a holy regard to the name, the word, and the glory of God, together with an affectionate regard to the temporal and internal interests of their fellow-creatures.

PRAYER-MEETING.

Many were gathered together praying.—Acts xii. 12.

THE Acts of the Apostles is the ecclesiastical history of the first ages of Christianity; and is truly valuable, not only on account of its antiquity, but for the artless simplicity and unimpeachable integrity with which it is written. In this book we have a relation of the early and rapid progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notwithstanding it was in general preached by plain and unlettered men, and had to contend with the proud philosophy of the gentile schools, and the deep-rooted prejudice of the unbelieving and hardened Jews; although it was opposed by civil and ecclesiastical rulers with all their legal authority and power, and by the infatuated populace with noise and tumult: yet “the word of the Lord grew and multiplied.” Acts xii. 24.

This part of the word is peculiarly interesting to the people of God, because it contains an impartial description of the constitution, discipline, and officers of the primitive churches, and presents to us that plain, useful, and perfect pattern, after which every Christian society, which professes to venerate the authority of Christ and his apostles, should be formed. Those churches had a peculiar glory and lustre attending upon them, through being “edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Ghost.” Acts ix. 31. This happy state was instrumentally produced by the disinterestedness and union of the first Christians. Chap. ii. 44; iv. 32. The union of Christians is at once their glory and strength. They were also remarkably diligent in all the means of grace: they forsook not the assembling of themselves together. Chap. ii. 42. In the last of these, we find, by our text, the church of Jerusalem was now occupied: “Many were gathered together praying.”

In the darkest and most afflicting times of the church there will be some found who are faithful to Christ and the truth: the disciples of Christ have been forbidden to assemble together; the apostles have been strictly enjoined to speak no more in the name of Jesus; Stephen has been stoned, and James, the brother of John, has been killed by the sword of Herod, and still they continue to meet, and devote the hours of midnight to the worship of God. They that love Christ will never forget nor forsake him: they say, by their actions, to their persecutors, what Peter had boldly said to the council, “We ought to obey God rather than man.” Acts v. 29.

The place where they were now assembled to worship was the dwelling-house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark. It is evident, by the conversation which Christ had with the woman of Samaria, that all idea of the sanctity of places was to be done away under the gospel dispensation; and the disciples of Jesus Christ carry their Master’s doctrine into full practice.

When useful ministers are silenced, and hindered in their work by arbitrary and persecuting governors, it is a great affliction to the church, and calls for frequent and fervent prayer. This was now the case at

Jerusalem : some of the ministers of Christ had fallen a sacrifice ; some were scattered, and others were in prison. Perhaps this meeting for prayer had for its immediate object Peter's deliverance, seeing it is said, "Prayer was made without ceasing of the church to God for him." Verse 5. Whilst the church were uniting together in prayer, the angel of the Lord is sent to release and restore their minister to them again. What a pleasing incident was this deliverance in itself ! what a striking interposition of the power and providence of God ! what a signal answer to prayer !

The messenger from heaven having fulfilled his commission in bringing Peter out of prison, instantly departed from him, offering him no further advice nor assistance, but leaving him to follow that line of conduct which a lawful concern for his own personal safety and the dictates of common prudence would suggest. Extraordinary guidance and assistance are only to be expected in seasons of peculiar necessity : both the judgment and feelings of Peter dictate that he should immediately associate himself with the disciples of Jesus ; and where is he so likely to find them as at the house of that well-known and long-tried disciple Mary ? and how pleasing, when he comes, though in the silent hour of midnight, to find them holding a meeting of prayer ! Of such meetings I am now to discourse ; in doing which I shall,

I. Speak of their nature.

The kind of prayer of which we are now speaking has sometimes been denominated social, because it is offered by a society of Christians in their collective capacity, convened for that particular purpose, either on some peculiar and extraordinary occasion, or at a stated and regular season.

Prayer-meetings are sometimes special, and relate to some particular object.

1. At the meeting and parting of dear friends, especially churches and ministers. Acts. xx. 36. It would be much better with us if more of our social and friendly meetings were literally meetings of prayer.

2. When the church is subject to unusual darkness, deadness, and barrenness. This remark applies either to the church at large, or to any distinct society. When it goes ill with Zion, all real believers will realize something of the prophet's feelings, and express themselves in his language. Hab. iii. 2. But to pray individually for the prosperity of Zion will not suffice ; the people of God will associate together for prayer, and thereby keep alive and increase their devotional frames. Acts i. 14.

3. Special meetings for prayer should be frequent and numerous in times of public calamity. There is encouragement to this from the promise of God, Ps. l. 15, and also from many striking instances upon record in the word. That was an interesting period in the history of Israel. 1 Sam. vii. 5, 10, 12. That was also a truly solemn meeting for prayer which the tribes of Israel held after their return from Babylon. Neh. ix. 3, 4. We have another remarkable instance of the Lord's answering prayer, when offered in the day of trouble and calamity, in the case of Jehoshaphat and Judah. 2 Chron. xx. 18—24. These instan-

ces of the people of God uniting in prayer in special seasons of national danger, hold forth, in all ages, both an example and an encouragement to the church.

We shall now speak of meetings for prayer which are stated and regular: of these there are several kinds.

1. Those weekly meetings for prayer which have a special regard to the "state of our nation and churches." These meetings were formed upon the best motives, and are conducted with much seriousness and devotion: their object is truly interesting. The Lord has not yet said of Britain as he said of the Jews to the prophet. Jer. vii. 16.

2. There are other meetings, denominated "Missionary prayer-meetings," because they are held principally with a view to the spread of the everlasting gospel in heathen and unenlightened countries abroad, and to the introducing it in dark towns and villages at home.

3. Those weekly meetings which are held in most of the churches and congregations where the gospel is preached faithfully and successfully. To the influence of these meetings we scruple not to ascribe that spiritual-mindedness, that holy zeal for the spread of the gospel, that more frequent and steady attendance upon the means of grace, and that strong and cordial union among Christians. The more this spirit of prayer is kept alive and extended among us, the more will its benefits be seen and felt in every direction. It is to these weekly meetings of prayer that our thoughts are at present principally directed; and therefore I shall proceed,

II. To point out the objects to which they should be chiefly directed. They may with propriety embrace sinners at large. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

But the special and more immediate object upon which we should fix our attention, is the welfare of Zion: we should carry with us into our prayer-meetings the sentiments and feelings of David. Ps. cxxii. 6—9. We should be very earnest and importunate with God, that the boundaries of the church may be enlarged and extended on every side.

Our prayers should not only be directed to God for its enlargement, by the addition of new converts, but also for the advancement of its edification, by a growth in knowledge, grace, and holiness. To this end, we must follow the directions of our blessed Master; Matt. ix. 38; and also that he will keep those whom he hath sent sound in the faith, walking closely with God, and adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

Whilst in our social meetings of prayer we express our desires to God for the prosperity of Zion at large, and especially for those sister-churches that walk in the same faith and order with us, let us remember, that the primary object of these meetings is the peace, union, and prosperity of our own society: it should operate with us as a powerful stimulus, that there are many who worship with us in the general congregation, yea, some perhaps in our own families, who have not yet discovered the glory, or felt the power of the Christian religion: it should be the constant subject of our prayer, that they may be truly converted to God.

But now, to be more particular: seeing, in our weekly meetings of prayer, our own churches have a special interest in them, the objects which should immediately be prayed for, are:

1. A blessing upon the officers of the church, that they may have wisdom and grace so to manage its concerns, and to walk before it with such a temper of mind, and in such an outward walk and conversation, as may be productive of the most beneficial effects. 2 Thess. iii. 1.

2. Another particular subject of prayer at these meetings, should be the sick and afflicted members of the church. James v. 14. They should be carried by the whole society to the throne of grace, in the arms of faith and prayer.

3. For the weak and the feeble of the flock : these should be the immediate object of the church's care and attention.

4. The distressed and tempted soul has also a strong claim upon the church for an interest in its prayers, when surrounding the throne of mercy in its associate capacity.

5. In our social prayers we should not forget the backslider, who hath declined from the good ways of God. 1 John v. 16. Gal. vi. 1. What so likely to convince, humble, and restore a fallen brother, as making him the subject of humble and fervent prayer in our social meetings ?

6. We should pray for the unruly and disobedient. There were some of these in the church at Thessalonica, and Paul directed that they should be warned. 1 Thess. v. 14.

III. The great encouragement there is to begin and persevere in prayer-meetings.

1. The relation God stands in to his church is a strong ground of expectation. He is the God and Father of his people ; Matt. vi. 31, 32 ; and again, Luke xi. 13. From the promises every society of Christians may draw encouragement to ask largely, and expect confidently, the blessings of which they stand in need, seeing God is their Father, and that he has, in all ages, given his children ample proof of his tenderness, care, and liberality.

2. Christians may take much encouragement to associate in prayer, from the consideration of the great love which God has to the church. Jer. xxix. 11, 12 ; xxxi. 3. How beautifully Christ urges this doctrine upon his disciples ! John xvi. 26, 27.

3. Another source of encouragement to social prayer, is the express promise of Him who " abideth faithful, and cannot deny himself." 2 Tim. ii. 13. Matt. xviii. 20.

4. Christians have good reason to conclude their meeting together for prayer shall be attended with a blessing, because the glory of God is implicated in the safety and prosperity of all who fear him, and call upon him in sincerity and truth. Isa. xliii. 21. Num. xiv. 11, &c.

5. The peculiar interest which Christ takes in his church is another source of encouragement. Never let us forget, when we assemble for prayer, that He whom John saw, Rev. i. 13, takes special notice of, and regards our supplications. Let us not then fear to ask much, and to ask often. John xvi. 24.

6. And, lastly, we should be greatly encouraged in our meetings of prayer in the remembrance of God having so wonderfully answered the prayers of his people. Prayer is a mighty weapon, and has accomplished marvellous things : the same effects which have been ascribed to faith, may be justly ascribed to prayer. Heb. xi. 32, 34.

Those wonderful deliverances which were wrought for the church in the wilderness, were for the most part afforded as immediate answers to prayers. Josh. x. 12. 1 Sam. vii. 10. 1 Kings xvii. 6. It has checked, broken, and destroyed numerous and well-appointed armies. Isa. xxxvii. 4, 36. It has turned away the wrath of God, when it was just on the point of breaking forth as a devouring flame. Ex. xxxii. 9—14. It has changed all the wisdom and experience of wise and crafty politicians into foolishness, and made their best-concerted and most secret plans the instruments of their shame and of their destruction. Compare 2 Sam. xv. 31 with 2 Sam. xvii. 14—23. It has broken open the prison-door of the grave, and liberated the mouldering captive. John xi. 41—44. Finally, it has, in a manner, conquered and overcome the Almighty : pressing through every difficulty, and refusing to take any denial, it has at last prevailed ; and not only received the blessing, but received it with high commendation : such was the nature of the prayer of Jacob at Bethel, and also that of the woman of Canaan.

IV. The blessings which attend them in those countries and churches where they are most frequent and best conducted.

1. They are a blessing to the country. The praying part of the community are its glory and its strength ; Gen. xviii. 32 ; and it was because there were a few of these praying people among the Jews, in the days of the prophet, that he observes, Isa. i. 9.

2. Prayer-meetings are a signal blessing to our churches : they tend to enlarge and strengthen the bond of Christian union ; to make the weak strong, and the strong stronger still : this is one of the mediums by which Christian societies go from strength to strength. Ps. lxxxiv. 7. This is one of the instruments by which the Holy Spirit fans the flame of true devotion, and keeps the soul alive to God. In short, prayer-meetings are nurseries both to the gifts and graces of Christian societies.

3. They promote the edification and comfort of all the parts of the church. The afflicted, tempted, and fearful, are helped to meet difficulties with more patience. Phil. i. 19. A praying people are helpers of their ministers. 2 Cor. i. 11. They perform for their ministers the needful and honourable office which Aaron and Hur performed for Moses. Ex. xvii. 12. I shall now hasten to a conclusion of this subject, with an address to three descriptions of hearers, by way of

Improvement.—1. To you who never attend prayer-meetings. Perhaps it is a subject to which you have never seriously turned your thoughts, as to its being a question of duty ; or, it may be, the service itself may be objectionable to you, because some exercise in prayer, who have but small gifts, and the inaccuracies of whose language are to you disgusting. But those prayers which are very plain indeed, are frequently so scriptural, so devout, and withal so appropriate to the feelings and trials of the Christian, as to render them highly useful. But, in regard to giving countenance to prayer-meetings by your personal attendance, we urge you to it by the consideration both of duty and interest. Heb. x. 25.

2. To you who once constantly attended them, and that with advantage to yourselves and others, we address the expostulatory reproof of the apostle, Gal. v. 7.

Is it better with your soul now than it was then, or is it as well? Or, rather, is it not worse with you in all respects? Rev. ii. 5.

3. To you that attend and take an active part in prayer-meetings.

The person praying should not speak to God as an individual; but, as it is a social service, he should speak in a manner suitable to it.

It is equally wrong to make our prayers the medium of publishing our political creed; to endeavour to make God a party in those differences. Neither let your prayers be tinged with the leaven of your private disputes and contentions. Let your zeal for the glory of God, and the prosperity of Zion, swallow up every inferior consideration. Isa. lxii. 1.

CLOSET-PRAYER.

And when he had sent the multitudes away, &c.—Matt. xiv. 23.

THE duty which the children of God owe to their heavenly Father, is, in some measure, naturally to be inferred from the relation itself, as well as from the precepts of the word and the example of Jesus Christ. He often proposed his own temper and actions as the model, after which all his disciples shall copy: "Learn of me," was a maxim which Jesus Christ constantly inculcated. In his practice we see beautifully illustrated that maxim of Solomon, Eccl. iii. 1.

If Jesus Christ found it needful and advantageous to engage in retired devotion, how much more so must it be for such weak and imperfect creatures as we are, not only ministers, but private Christians, also! May I be enabled so to speak of this subject, as to engage some to adopt it who have hitherto neglected it, and stimulate others to continue it with growing pleasure and more abundant profit!

I. The nature and grounds of this duty. Closet, or secret-prayer, is a very important branch of Christian duty, and, as such, is much spoken of in the scriptures; whence we shall derive all our reflections concerning the nature and grounds of it. It has its name from the manner in which the great Head of the church himself recommended it. Matt. vi. 6. In this passage the duty of closet-prayer, is plainly and strongly inculcated.

Next to the precept which we have just cited, secret prayer is most strongly recommended, by the example of Jesus Christ.

Frequent prayer to God in secret has been practised by the saints of God in every age; we find many instances of it among the patriarchs, especially Jacob, who sought his God with so much success at Bethel, and also at Peniel. The prophets, also, from Samuel to Malachi, were men who practised this duty, especially Daniel, who braved the danger of death rather than give up the privilege of calling upon his God in his own habitation. The practice was also continued under New Testament times. It is not improbable that the holy man Nathaniel was engaged in secret devotions in that secluded spot, of which Christ speaks in John i. 48. Acts x. 9.

We say of closet-prayer, which is recommended to us upon such

high authority as that of which we have been speaking, that it is an important and indispensable part of religion. This species of prayer is inseparable from a state of grace; it is one of the first, one of the plainest and strongest symptoms of spiritual life. Acts ix. 11.

In our closet-devotions we have the most free and unrestrained intercourse with God. Every heart knows its own bitterness. The Christian has trials, conflicts, and temptations; all which he can spread before the Lord, and before him only.

II. The manner and spirit in which this duty should be performed.

When a Christian retires from the company and converse of his fellow creatures, for the express purpose of addressing himself individually to God in prayer, the action itself seems to say, "Thou God seest me."

From this view of the subject, it follows, that our closet devotions should be solemn and devout, because we approach a great God, who cannot be deceived, and who will not be mocked. They should be cheerful and unreserved, because they are presented to a God who takes delight in his people approaching to him. Matt. vi. 6.

When Christians seclude themselves from the world for the special purpose of praying to their God and Father, they may to this duty very suitably join others; such as,

1. Reading the holy scriptures: we should read the Bible to "hear what God the Lord will speak," for he will speak peace to his saints. We should read it in our closets, in order to know what we ought to believe, and what we ought to do.

2. We should unite with private prayer the profitable duty of meditation. To practise and enjoy this, Isaac went out into the field at the eventide. Gen. xxiv. 63. It is not unlikely but he mingled secret prayer with his meditations. Nature, providence, and grace, each presents an instructive volume to our view.

3. Above all, we should not neglect the duty of self-examination. The season of retirement is the proper season of inquiry into the state of our souls. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

In the management of this part of religious duty we have no precise law to guide us, as to its frequency, or the express time at which it should be performed. David speaks upon the subject, Ps. lv. 17, and Daniel, chap. vi. 10. Many Christians take these holy men as patterns, and steadily retire to their closets at the times mentioned.

Let us then diligently attend to closet religion, and to the manner and spirit in which it is carried on. This is a true barometer by which to judge of the general state of religion in our souls.

III. The particular objects in relation to which it is practised. Considered as a stated and regular medium of intercourse with God, it has to do with the progress of our souls in knowledge, grace, and holiness, and the obtaining guidance and assistance from him in all seasons of peculiar need.

1. There are some particular occasions in regard to which this duty may be practised to advantage. When about any business of moment, Gen. xxiv. 12, when entering upon any new calling in life. It is not improbable that it was on some such occasion that "Jabez called on the

God of Israel." 1 Chron. iv. 10. This is a suitable prayer for a religious tradesman. If God prosper us in life, or grant us any particular or special comfort, we should retire to our closets, and beseech him to give us wisdom and grace to manage our affairs with discretion. Judges xiii. 8.

Private prayer has been offered to God by good men on account of a great variety of domestic circumstances. Gen. xxv. 21. 2 Sam. xii. 16. Prayer should be united with all the principal occurrences of social life.

2. There are some particular seasons in which Christians should be much in private prayer. It should precede, accompany, and follow our attendance upon public ordinances: we have an example for this in Jesus Christ himself. Luke iii. 21.

Again, in times of affliction we should be very frequent in our closet devotions, Ps. l. 15, and the scriptures abound with examples. Judges xv. 18, 19; 2 Chron. xii. 6, 12; xxxii. 24.

Christians should be much in the closet in times of public calamity. The exhortations given of old to the church at large, are not inapplicable to individual saints. Isa. xxvi. 20. Neh. i. 4.

Also in times when there is a great departure among professed believers from the knowledge, experience, and practice of true religion; then we should be much in our closets. Jer. xiii. 16, 17.

Once more. Seasons of suspense and embarrassments should lead us to much closet-prayer. Sometimes the providences of God are of such a dark and mysterious nature, as to warrant good men to make them the particular subject of prayer: Daniel did this, and the Lord sent an angel to him. Dan. x. 12. Jesus himself, when under great embarrassment and agitation, was frequent and importunate in private prayer. Matt. xxvi. 38—44.

3. The season of great ease and prosperity is a time when Christians should be much in secret prayer, because it is a state the most ensnaring and dangerous. "Lest I be full and deny thee." Prov. xxx. 9. Deut. xxxii. 15. If we would not fall into the same evil, in times of ease and prosperity, let us be much in communion with God in secret.

4. Good men should be much with God in their closets when they are about to enter upon services of a difficult and dangerous nature, or services which cannot be brought to a successful issue without the special presence and blessing of God. Judges xviii. 5. Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6. 1 Sam. xxiii. 10, 11.

IV. The blessings which arise to the real Christian from closet-prayer.

Attended to in the manner and with the spirit which we have been describing, it cannot fail to be productive of the most beneficial effects to the Christian. We all know how desirable and advantageous it is, in times of great difficulty and distress, to have an intimate, a bosom friend. In God we have a friend: from him we may expect counsel and advice, &c.

But, suppose, after we have spread our case before God, and given it up to his entire management, we do not immediately perceive his interference in our behalf, we shall derive advantage from carrying all our difficulties to our heavenly Father in secret. See Isa. xxvi. 3. Prov. iii. 6.

From this holy exercise the Christian often returns as "a giant refreshed with wine:" he returns strengthened in his inner man; he feels a heavenly vigour diffuse itself through all the powers of his renewed mind.

Through an humble and spiritual converse with God in the closet we shall derive an abundant measure of grace for our seasons of temptation. Matt. xxvi. 41. All the while we keep close to God in a life of secret prayer, we walk safely.

Being much with God in our closets, is calculated to produce an advancement of the power of genuine holiness in our hearts, and the universal and perpetual practice of it in our lives. It is an old and well-established maxim, that "praying will either make a man leave off sinning, or else sinning will make him leave off praying."

To conclude. Nothing keeps the mind of a real Christian in such a state of actual and habitual preparation for the whole will of God, as that branch of religion of which we are now speaking. We apply this reflection principally to the Christian's prospect of entering into eternity. As, from the top of Pisgah, Moses was privileged to view the land of promise; so the Christian, from the mount on which he is privileged to converse with God in prayer, is, at times, enabled to look at the true Canaan; and whilst he surveys its beauty, he feels the influence of that flame which glowed in the breast of the apostle. Phil. i. 23.

In aiming to improve this subject, I address myself,

1. To you who never retire from the cares and company of this world, either to converse with God, or direct your thoughts towards another. You are, in the fullest sense of the word, a prayerless person. Be not deceived upon this point; the word of God has united in one awful list those who are "the workers of iniquity," and those who "called not upon the Lord." Ps. xiv. 4. Isa. lv. 6.

2. To others of you I may address the following scripture: "Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God." Job xv. 4. You have not always neglected private prayer; it may be that you were influenced to practise it for a time when young, through the influence of those precepts and examples which were placed before you; or, perhaps, you were led to adopt the practice of private prayer when you were in sickness and trouble. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. Those who finally apostatize from Christianity seldom do it in a sudden and instantaneous manner; their infidelity and irreligion are generally progressive: he who forsakes closet-prayer takes at least one step towards the dark and inhospitable regions of infidelity.

3. To the real Christian, who practises closet-prayer, both as a duty and a privilege, we use the language of congratulation. You find it, by experience, to be so important, that you cannot do without it. Yet you must not be surprised, if you find seasons in which you will enter your closet reluctantly, and return from it discouraged and distressed. Let not this cast you down, but rather take occasion from it to look forward with eagerness towards, and anticipate with greater pleasure, that world, where our communion with God shall be perfect in its nature, and eternal in its duration.

EJACULATORY PRAYER.

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.—Acts vii. 59.

THE last description of prayer, on which I proposed to discourse, was ejaculatory prayer ; and of this we have a most beautiful example in the truly devout and ardent expression of Stephen, in our text. It is not part of a regular prayer, but it is a solemn and pious ejaculation, arising out of the unexpected circumstances under which he was now placed. In discoursing of ejaculatory prayer, we shall speak,

I. Of its nature. The word by which it was denominated, like many other words which are in familiar use among Christians, is not a scriptural term ; but it is derived from a word which signifies to dart, or to shoot out suddenly ; and is therefore appropriate to describe the kind of prayer we now speak of, which is, in general, made up of short, detached, and unpremeditated sentences, frequently and spontaneously springing from the souls of the righteous.

Though this kind of prayer is produced in a more hasty and irregular manner than either of the kinds we have spoken of before, yet, as it is the offspring of the renewed mind, so it is not light and trifling, but serious and devout, and is often singularly pithy and vehement. It is also the medium through which those exhortations, “Praying always,” Eph. vi. 18, and “Pray without ceasing,” 1 Thess. v. 17, are most fully and most frequently exemplified. I proceed to show,

II. That we have many instances and examples of ejaculatory prayer in the word of God : they are of two kinds ; those which are mental, in which the heart alone speaks to God ; and those which are external, the voice accompanying the heart.

Of that inward ejaculatory prayer, by which the prayer silently sighs out his wants and miseries to God, we have one instance in the case of Moses. Ex. xiv. 15. We have another example of this kind in the history of that good woman, Hannah. 1 Sam. i. 12. She darted forth, in strong ejaculations to God, those petitions which, though often repeated, apparently without any success, were at last abundantly answered, and returned into her bosom the blessing she had so long sought. We have also one more striking elucidation of our subject, in the experience of Nehemiah. Chap. i. 4. From a due consideration of all the circumstances of this passage, it is most reasonable to conclude that he prayed in devout and fervent ejaculations.

But we are to show, that there are instances of ejaculatory prayer, in which the voice announces the desire of the soul.

Sometimes, the soul expresses itself in those devout and sudden emotions, which we denominate ejaculations, by the medium of adoration. John xx. 28.

At other times, the ejaculatory exercises of the soul are expressed by the medium of complaint and lamentation. Rom. vii. 24, 25.

Again, holy and devout ejaculations arise to God from the Christian, most of all in a way of petition and supplication. Gen. xliii. 29. Judges xvi. 28. Luke xxiii. 42, 43. But the most interesting and impres-

sive of all the instances we are capable of adducing upon the subject of ejaculatory prayer, will be found in the example of Jesus Christ. Luke xxiii. 34.

Another way in which the souls of good men have been drawn out in ejaculation, has been by expressions of holy submission to God, when sorely afflicted by the visitations of his hand ; and by ardent appeals to God, when oppressed and persecuted by the children of men. Job i. 21. Of the latter we have an example in David. 1 Sam. xxiv. 12.

The last species of ejaculation which I shall mention, is that of thanksgiving and praise ; of which we have one instance in the case of Abraham's servant, when he went to find a wife for Isaac. Gen. xxiv. 27. We have another specimen of this kind of ejaculation in the case of David. 1 Sam. xxv. 32. I shall produce but one instance more, which is that of our blessed Master. Matt. xi. 25, 26.

III. I proceed to show the times and seasons when we should exercise ourselves in ejaculatory prayer. It is one of the principal excellences of this kind of prayer, that it can be practised at all times, in all places, and in all the daily occupations of life : but we shall notice some particular seasons.

It is proper to mingle this kind of prayer with all the public ordinances of religion. All the success of preaching depends upon the assistance and blessing of God ; and therefore both preachers and hearers should often send up ejaculations to God. The prophets frequently broke off in the middle of a set discourse, or sermon, to ask God's presence and blessing. Isa. xxxiii. 2. Mic. vii. 14. In like manner Jesus Christ, when preaching concerning his own sufferings, and their depressing influence upon his soul, prays, "Father, glorify thy name." John xii. 28. Serious and attentive hearers also have much opportunity for this kind of prayer, whilst going to, and when seated in, their places of worship. The real Christian wants the light of gospel truth reflected upon his understanding, the power of it to be felt upon his conscience, and the purity of it transcribed into his life and conversation : every sermon, therefore, which he hears, he accompanies with holy and fervent ejaculations to God, that it may be followed with his grace and blessing. At the Lord's table the Christian should abound in ejaculatory prayer.

We may accompany all our lawful undertakings, both common and extraordinary, with short and serious petitions to God. Thus Jacob, Gen. xliii. 14. Thus David, 2 Sam. xv. 31.

Times of affliction, temptation, and danger, are also suitable seasons for this kind of prayer. The first of these is exemplified in blind Bartimeus. Mark x. 47. We find an example of the second in the case of the apostle. 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8. In like manner, should all Christians, when suddenly and powerfully attacked by temptation, instantly cry out to God upon the very spot where it is made. The concluding branch of this remark is strongly expressed by the disciples, Matt. viii. 25 ; and also in the case of Peter singly, Matt. xiv. 30.

Good men have accustomed themselves to ejaculatory prayer at meeting and parting with each other, and also in their correspondence by letter. The former of these is seen in the instance of Boaz and his reapers. Ruth ii. 4. Instances of the latter very frequently occur in Paul's

writings to his son Timothy. 2 Tim. ii. 7; iv. 22. In this same epistle, speaking of a good man who had greatly assisted and comforted him whilst he was a prisoner at Rome, he blends with descriptions of his kindness pious ejaculations for his prosperity.

We are not precluded from this species of prayer even when passing and repassing through the most populous streets.

Ejaculatory prayer may also be practised by the serious and contemplative mind, even amidst the hurry and bustle of worldly occupations.

Our seasons of social intercourse will furnish us with abundant matter for ejaculatory prayer. If we hear of friends and neighbours who are sick and dying, let us pray for them; if we hear of the declensions and falls of other professors, let us also fear, and lift up our hearts to God in the language of David. Ps. xxxv. 13. If we hear of the conversion of a fellow-sinner, let us imitate the angels, among whom there is joy, Luke xv. 7, and let us wrestle with God for the coming of that day, when all shall know him, from the least to the greatest.

Lastly. In times of sickness and pain, or when the hour of dissolution is approaching, we should exercise ourselves much in the use of ejaculatory prayer. We might not only take Christ and Stephen as patterns of this kind of prayer, in the hour of their departure out of time, but we might give a long list of beautiful and instructive examples from the lives of the martyrs.

IV. The encouragement there is to this kind of prayer, and the blessings which result from it. It is a species of devotion that can receive no impediment from the consideration of time or place.

We have great encouragement to engage in this description of prayer, from the kind attention God has given to them who have practised it. 1 Chron. v. 20. The prayer which was thus prevalent with God could be no other than ejaculatory, since it was offered up to him in the very heat of the conflict.

The malefactor, who suffered on the cross with Jesus Christ, no sooner said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom," than the Saviour answered immediately, without hesitation or delay, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Luke xxiii. 42, 43. To be successful with God in obtaining spiritual blessings, it requires neither loud nor long prayers.

One blessing attendant upon the habitual and serious exercise of ejaculatory prayer, is, that it helps to keep the heart from the inroads of vain, worldly, and wicked thoughts. The heart of man is never totally unoccupied: if it be not occupied with God and good things, it will soon be under the influence of the prince of darkness. James iv. 7.

Another advantage which follows ejaculatory prayer, is, that it gives the mind a more ready and permanent bias towards other spiritual and stated services, whether performed in the closet, the family, or the church. It enables us to enjoy their true sweetness while engaged in them. Ps. lxxiii. 28.

Again, The constant practice of ejaculatory prayer tends to make us resemble Enoch, of whom it is said, that "he walked with God." Gen. v. 22. It tends to make our affections spiritual, and to attract them towards the heavenly world, and so to produce a compliance with the

apostle's advice. Col. iii. 2. It brings us, in a measure, to have our conversation in heaven.

In attempting some improvement of this subject, we address ourselves,

1. To worldly and carnal men. If you ever utter anything in a way of prayer, it is by ejaculation; but even this savours more of profaneness than of devotion, in the manner you practise it. Sometimes, after being intensely heated with passion, and breaking forth in a torrent of profane swearing, conscience dictates a cold and formal ejaculation, "God forgive me!" At other times, the slightest matter of surprise leads you to exclaim, "Lord have mercy upon me!" or, "Christ have mercy upon me!" These ejaculations have not in them the nature of true prayer: they are direct and express violations of the third commandment. Ex. xx. 7.

2. To mere professors of religion, who totally neglect this kind of prayer, we address the language of reproof. You think it is enough to say your prayers stately: and, having done this, you think no more either of God or religion, till the regular season of devotion comes round again. It should be told you that one leading trait of difference between the formal professor and the real Christian lies in this.

3. To the real Christian we offer exhortation and advice: to practise this kind of prayer with success, you must cultivate a familiar acquaintance with the following subjects:

The evil of sin, and a tenderness of conscience in regard to it. Ps. xix. 12, 13. The love of God to us in Jesus Christ: this has an attractive influence upon the soul, drawing it away from earth and sin, and assimilating it to the mind and spirit of him whose essence is love.

We shall also abound in ejaculatory prayer, in proportion as we discern our interest in Jesus and his salvation.

Another subject calculated to enlarge the soul in ejaculatory prayer, is the doctrine of Divine providence: providence which has to do with the Christian in particular, and which extends to all his personal, relative, and spiritual concerns.

Again, We shall be much engaged in lifting up our souls to the Lord, in this kind of prayer, if we attain to much spiritual-mindedness. Matt. xxvi. 44.

Finally. To be habitually practising ejaculatory prayer requires an abundant supply of grace, and the continual influence of the Holy Spirit, as the spirit of grace and supplication. Eph. iv. 30.

PERSEVERANCE AND WATCHFULNESS IN PRAYER.

Praying always, with all prayer, &c.—Eph. vi. 18.

THE believing Ephesians are here taught by the apostle what they have to expect in this world; nothing less than a constant warfare, and that too with no common enemy, as may be seen by the description given,

verse 12. He would not have them, however, be discouraged by the view of either the multitude or the strength of their opposers, nor yet to trust in the least degree to their own wisdom and strength. Verse 10. When Christians can do this, in the exercise of a strong faith, they may despise all the efforts of their most potent and malignant foe, and exult in the beautiful language of the apostle, "If God be for us," Rom. viii. 31, &c.

To manage the arduous conflict with success, it is requisite we should put on "the whole armour," verse 13, which the apostle describes; and then he introduces the words of my text: "Praying always," &c. intimating, that it was not enough to be duly apprised of the nature and strength of the enemy, and to have on the armour of defence ready for the attack; but even then there must be much and constant prayer to God for wisdom, courage, and ability to persevere in the conflict: for, having once entered the field under Jesus, the Captain of our salvation, we must never think of obtaining peace, or putting off our armour, till we have reached the blissful shores of our heavenly Canaan, and can join in that delightful triumph of the church, Rev. xii. 10, 11. In our text the apostle directs the Ephesians:

I. To pray with all prayer. What is the import of this expression? It may be considered under two ideas.

There are divers kinds of prayer. They are all important: none of them can be slighted with propriety by the real Christian. They occupy distinct and separate stations in the good man's general sphere of action, and it should be his care to keep them from clashing one with the other. As in a well-constructed piece of mechanism every wheel and every pin has its proper station, and performs its office in a regular manner, all operating to the production of one grand effect; so it is in religion. 1 Cor. xiv. 33. We are not to be at home engaging in private prayer, when duty calls us to public prayer, &c. It is natural to infer, from the view we have been taking of prayer, what a burden religion must be to a worldly man! With the real Christian it is exactly the reverse: he can say with truth, that the service of his God "is perfect freedom."

Prayer is composed of a variety of parts. Some arrange these under a smaller, and some under a larger number of particulars. From the examples of prayer which we have in the Old Testament, and also from the manner in which Christ taught his disciples to pray, I am led to divide the parts of prayer into Adoration, Confession, Petition, and Thanksgiving.

1. When we approach God in prayer, it should be with sentiments of profound *veneration*: he is the infinitely great and eternal God, and we are creatures but of yesterday: he is the holy and righteous God, and we sinners by nature and by practice. If, then, we know who and what God is, when we come near to his throne we shall adore and worship him in the most humble manner. A view of his majesty and greatness will penetrate our souls with godly fear, and a sense of the riches of his mercy will inspire us with trust and confidence. Our souls will feel much of that temper which is manifested in the language of Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 34, 35.

2. Another part of prayer is *confession*. The deep depravity of our

nature, Jer. xvii. 9, and the numberless sins which proceed from that corrupt source, furnish abundant matter for this part of prayer. The fifty-first Psalm, the language of the returning prodigal, and of the publican who went into the temple to pray, are among the finest examples of genuine confession; of that kind of confession which the scriptures connect with salvation, inasmuch as it is said, "If we confess our sins," &c. 1 John i. 9.

3. The next branch of true prayer is *petition*. Man is an indigent creature in every respect, and can never be addressed in a more suitable language than Rev. iii. 17. He is, therefore, in himself the most forlorn and dependent creature; but it is only the Christian who sees and feels, and, consequently, acts in conformity to this humbling truth: he comes as a beggar to the door of mercy.

4. The last branch of prayer is *thanksgiving* and *praise*. This is mentioned in a very distinct manner by the apostle. Phil. iv. 6. This branch of the subject may be divided into two parts. In the first, there is a particular and direct acknowledgment made to God for the mercies received. We may illustrate this point by the language of David, Ps. ciii. 2, 3. The other branch of thanksgiving is more general. We have examples of this in Matt. vi. 13. Jude, verses 24, 25.

II. In this text the apostle recommends "praying always;" every work of the good man's hand should be prefaced, accompanied with, and followed by prayer. Acts vi. 4. 1 Thess. iii. 10.

In this part of the subject I shall particularly urge upon you constancy and perseverance in prayer.

1. To you who have, in past times, bowed your knee to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and now live prayerless, we say, "Ye did run well, who did hinder you?" Gal. v. 7. Such persons may be thus addressed, "Thou castest off fear." Job xv. 4. The Jews were an awful instance of this, as appears by Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

The temporary and short-lived nature of the disposition of some men to pray may be seen in the case of affrighted mariners, whose distress and conduct, when in danger of shipwreck, is beautifully described, Ps. cvii. 23—30. But no sooner is the storm ended, and they find themselves in safety, than they utterly forget the God on whom they called.

Such also is the prayer of the man who is affrighted by the grand and awful representations which the Almighty is pleased sometimes to make of himself in earthquakes, inundations, yea, even in ordinary storms of thunder and lightning.

Again, the subject is illustrated by the prayers of the sick man, who, while his recovery is yet doubtful, is constant and devout in his supplications: but all his devotions evaporate on the first symptom of returning health: to such persons may be applied the words of our Lord, Matt. xii. 45.

We address this part of our subject to backsliders in general. You, in times past, sought God by prayer, not only in the public assembly of his saints, but also in your closet; but now you have lost all the good impressions you once had; though like Felix, whilst the preacher "reasoned of righteousness," &c. Acts xxv. 25. Though, like Herod,

you heard the word gladly, and did many things, Mark vi. 20, yet now you set truth and conscience at defiance. If this is your character, what are you better than an apostate? How awful is your state! How justly may the words of scripture be applied to you! 2 Pet. ii. 21, 22.

2. I come now to urge constancy and perseverance in prayer on those Christians who are often tempted to leave it off. The scriptures would not have abounded with such exhortations as 1 Thess. v. 17, Rom. xii. 12, were it not that the soul is liable to be discouraged by difficulties and temptations.

Sometimes, they are tempted to this by their want of liberty and enlargement in prayer: others are discouraged in prayer, because they feel so many shortcomings and imperfections in their prayers. You forget, Christian, too much and too often, that your prayers do pass through the hands of Jesus Christ, and are perfumed with the incense of his merit. Rev. v. iii. 3, 4. Others are tempted to give up seeking the Lord by prayer, because he delays to answer them. These are often crying out, Lam. iii. 44. Hab. i. 2. Yet, remember, Hab. ii. 3. We have also many striking instances, in which the Lord has kept his people long praying and waiting before he has vouchsafed to say, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." David relates his own experience, Ps. xl. 1—3. And it is also related of Abraham, Heb. vi. 15. See Rom. viii. 24, 25; and James v. 7, 8. Be not, then, Christian, discouraged by not receiving an immediate answer to your petitions: go on praying; the Lord is not slack concerning his promises; and you have abundant proof, that "praying breath is never spent in vain."

III. Our text recommends *watching unto prayer*; the nearness and importance of the connexion between prayer and watching is plain, by the frequency of those passages in which they are jointly recommended to the Christian. Luke xxi. 36. Col. iv. 2. 1 Pet. iv. 7. This apostle knew by fatal experience, the vast importance of what was here recommended. It has been exemplified in the experience and practice of the saints. Neh. iv. 9.

1. The Christian should watch for opportunities to pray, or he will but seldom find them.

2. In prayer we should watch over our own hearts, which are so deceitful and unstable. Prov. iv. 23.

3. Watch against hinderances to stated seasons of prayer. We are in danger of this from many sources.

4. Watch against intruders which would disturb you while exercising in prayer. If it is your desire to "attend upon the Lord without distraction," you must be constant and diligent in this duty. Gen. xv. 11.

5. Watch against the great enemy of souls, who is ever going about either to destroy you, or to disturb you in your religious exercises, which instrumentally subserve your eternal salvation. Job. i. 6. Zech. iii. 1.

6. Watch for an answer to prayer. Too many when they have finished prayer, rise up and go their way, and think no more about the matter. Not so the good man; he, like David, will not only say, "Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation!" but he will add, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak," Ps. lxxxv. 7, &c. Compare 1 Kings xviii. 1, 41—46, with James v. 17, 18. So let us be looking and watching for an answer to prayer.

IV. Christians should *pray in or with the Spirit*. Praying "in the Spirit," 1 Cor. xiv. 15, either means praying under the influence of the Holy Ghost, or with divine fervour.

In speaking of divine fervour in prayer, I notice, 1. That it is urged by a variety of scriptures in which prayer is spoken of, all of which imply an earnest and vigorous exercise of the mind. To pray is to "pour out" the heart; Ps. lxii. 8; to "wrestle with God;" Gen. xxxii. 24; to "cry;" Ps. ix. 12; to "sigh and groan;" Ps. xii. 5; to "strive;" Rom. xv. 30; to "give God no rest;" Isa. lxii. 7: and in the text, it is "supplication in the Spirit." In all these places we are taught that true prayer is very fervent and importunate.

2. Earnestness and fervour in prayer may be urged by the consideration of the value of the blessings for which we pray; nothing less than "grace and glory." Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

3. We may take an argument to be fervent in prayer from the arduous nature of the conflict in which we are engaged.

4. Fervency in prayer is recommended by examples recorded in the word of God. Gen. xxxii. 26, 28. We have also a striking example of fervent prayer in the woman who came to our Lord, Matt. xv. 22; and in our Lord himself, Luke xxii. 44.

V. When a Christian maintains a life of prayer according to the directions given in this text, it will produce a very advantageous influence upon his spiritual warfare, and assist him in the use of the armour which God hath provided.

1. By thus exercising ourselves in prayer we shall *stand* firm in the day of battle. He that is much with God in prayer, stands not only on even but on elevated ground, and must ultimately have the advantage.

2. Praying always with all prayer has a tendency to inspire the soul with *courage* in this arduous conflict. Living near to God in prayer makes the soul as bold as a lion: hence Elisha, who was a man of much prayer, when his house was surrounded by a host, was enabled to say to his servant, "Fear not." 2 Kings vi. 16.

3. They who pray always, and with all prayer, will be *skilful* and *active* in the use of the Christian armour.

4. Abounding in prayer has a tendency to keep our armour bright and fit for use: yea, it gives the Christian soldier a promptness for action. By the means of prayer, the girdle of truth, and the breastplate of righteousness are girded on tight; the helmet of hope, and the shoes of peace fit well, and become proof against the most furious assaults; and the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit, are grasped with a firm hand, and are wielded with energy.

5. It is by fervent and persevering prayer that the believer finally obtains the victory in every conflict. Whilst we cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and watch in prayer, Satan gains little or no advantage over us. To conclude:

1. Are we engaged in this holy warfare, with the description of which our text is connected? we shall not "endure hardness, as good soldiers," 2 Tim. ii. 3, but as we pray always and with all prayer.

2. What an awful state is yours, who have been induced to commence a life of prayer, either through the pressure of adverse providences, or

the temporary alarms of your consciences, and have fallen back into a state of total indifference and irreligion? Isa. xxvi. 16. Ah! thoughtless sinner! thou wilt be in trouble again, and then with what face wilt thou return to a throne of grace?

3. Our last reflection is for the comfort and encouragement of God's praying people: keep on in the holy exercise; exemplifying that sentence, "faint, yet pursuing." Let thy soul be animated with the pleasing thought, that Christ prays for thee, Heb. viii. 25, and the Holy Spirit makes intercession within thee. Rom. viii. 26. Through all the changes of the Christian life, be this thy constant practice, "Praying always with all prayer," &c.

THE

HOLY SPIRIT'S ASSISTANCE IN PRAYER.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, &c.—Rom. viii. 26.

To take away all glorying in what we may have attained to in the Christian life, and to encourage us in the expectation of all we need in time to come, the apostle frequently speaks of the Holy Ghost as the agent by whom all the great branches of the gospel are revealed to the understanding, and applied to the conscience, and who assists the Christian in all his devotional exercises. The Holy Spirit's assistance in prayer is now the subject of our attention, and to this the words of our text evidently refer; in discoursing upon which I shall,

I. Offer some general remarks.

1. The Holy Spirit's assistance in prayer is not one of those subjects at which the scriptures merely glance, but it is frequently mentioned both in the Old and New Testaments. In the former of these, it is the subject of prophecy and promise. Zech. xii. 10. Some interpret this text as having immediate reference to the day of Pentecost, which is also predicted by another of the prophets. Joel. ii. 28. The exact fulfilment of this scripture is affirmed by the apostle Peter, when he is explaining and vindicating the great event alluded to in Acts ii. 4, 16. Compare Zech. xii. 10, with Acts ii. 37. The Spirit was eminently in them as a Spirit of "grace and supplication:" and he is thus in all the true children of God, in every age and in every place.

In the New Testament, the doctrine of the Spirit's help in prayer is taught, both in a way of exhortation and encouragement. In Eph. vi. 18. Jude ver. 20. And in the words of my text, the apostle Paul endeavours to comfort the believing Romans, under all their sense of insufficiency in prayer, with this pleasing truth, that "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities," &c.

The accomplishment of the promise of having the Holy Ghost as a Spirit of "grace and supplication," is made sure to the disciples of Christ by the description which our Lord gives of him, who is the dispenser of this rich blessing. Luke xi. 13.

2. The Holy Spirit's helping of the infirmities of the saints is not a ca-

sual or uncertain thing, for it is a work to which he is in an especial manner appointed. Rom. viii. 27.

3. The Spirit on whom Christians are taught to depend for assistance in all their devotional exercises, especially prayer, is abundantly well qualified for his office. 1 Cor. ii. 11.

4. The Holy Spirit's assistance is afforded in such a manner, as not always to be very perceptible to the Christian himself. He does not always descend upon, or aid his people, as on the day of Pentecost; Acts ii. 2; but rather his agency resembles the soft and gentle southern gales, which, when they are scarcely felt, both refresh and invigorate. He comes to the help of his saints, not so much in "the earthquake," as in "the still, small voice." 1 Kings xix. 11, 12.

5. But for the agency of the Holy Spirit, many of us had long since given over prayer: he has enabled us to hope even against hope, otherwise we should have fainted. Micah vii. 7.

II. Show the necessity of the Holy Spirit's assistance in prayer. This may be urged upon a great variety of grounds; but I shall confine myself chiefly to that which arises from the words of my text. The apostle there speaks of the believer's "infirmities:" this word (infirmity) has a variety of significations attached to it in scripture; and in every one of them we shall find some proof of the proposition we are now discussing, that the assistance of the Holy Spirit in prayer is necessary.

1. A Christian has infirmity, as he is a frail and a mortal creature. Acts xiv. 15. The apostle, 1 Tim. v. 23, speaks of those bodily infirmities to which the frail creature man is subject: these are so great, and a strong sense of them so discouraging, that we should be overpowered when we draw nigh to God, did not the Holy Spirit afford us his aid.

2. A Christian is the subject of infirmity, as he is liable to affliction and temptation. The apostle, detailing some parts of his own experience, says, "I take pleasure in infirmities," &c. 2 Cor. xii. 10.

3. By infirmities is sometimes intended those weaknesses and defects which attach principally to an infantile state of grace. In an immediate reference to this is Rom. xv. 1. In the weak believer there is much remaining ignorance, unbelief, and fear; and these will hinder his approach to God in prayer, or make it unprofitable, unless the Spirit become his helper.

4. By infirmities is sometimes meant those sinful propensities which remain even in the children of God.

Amidst all these infirmities under which the saints groan, being burdened, and which may all be alluded to in the words of my text, what a rich source of encouragement is there for us in the scriptures, which assure us that "we have not an High-priest," &c. Heb. iv. 15, and that "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities!"

III. Speak of the nature and extent of that help which the Spirit affords the believer in prayer.

1. The Spirit may be said to help us in prayer as he gives us a spirit of prayer, and excites us to the constant practice of this duty. Dr. Manton, on James v. 16, says, "The term rendered *effectual fervent prayer*, properly signifies a prayer wrought and excited, and so implies

both the efficacy and influence of the Holy Spirit, and the force and vehemence of an earnest spirit." All true prayer is wrought and excited in the soul by the Holy Ghost; and until he begins to work, the soul never will pray in spirit and in truth.

2. The Spirit helps our infirmities in prayer, by teaching us *how* to pray: the Spirit, in teaching us to pray, never acts in contradiction to the word of God. This is the grand directory for the church, both as to the matter and manner of prayer: all that is necessary for us to know upon the subject is there placed before us, both in precept and example.

(1.) In teaching us how to pray, the Spirit will guide us as to the persons for *whom* we should pray.

(2.) The Spirit teaching us what to pray for, will act in harmony with the word: he will consequently teach us to pray for those blessings which are the subjects of promise. These are of three kinds, temporal, spiritual, and eternal. James i. 17. He is the sole proprietor of all earthly good; the cattle upon a thousand hills, and the gold and the silver, are *all his*. 1 Tim. iv. 8. We are also taught to place our dependence, for the supply of our temporal wants, upon the love and care of our covenant-God. Matt. vi. 32.

It is probable that Jabez prayed for temporal favours. 1 Chron. iv. 10. It is certain that Jacob prayed for temporal blessings when he expressed his desires to God in the form of a vow. Gen. xxviii. 20—22. Agur also sought temporal blessings at the throne of grace. Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

Spiritual blessings are also the proper subject of prayer, and Christians will daily want fresh supplies of these: their weakness, trials, and their conflicts, are so numerous that they would sink under them, but for the succour which is daily brought into the soul through the medium of prayer. They, therefore, should encourage each other in this holy work, in such language as Heb. iv. 16. Ezek. xxxvi. 37. There will never be a period on this side the grave when the real Christian will rise above the need of prayer: as it is among the first, it will also be among the last of the operations of God's Holy Spirit in the soul. Prayer was the first act of grace put forth by the apostle Paul after his conversion; and it was the last act of grace in which the dying martyr Stephen was engaged, previous to his entering the world of light and glory.

Glory is the subject also of the Christian's prayer. The darkness, the difficulties, and the dangers of the Christian's journey through this dreary and miserable world, often constrain him to direct his eye towards that land of promise in which the saints shall find the fullest accomplishment of that beautiful passage, Rev. xxi. 4. He is frequently led to breathe forth his soul in the pathetic exclamation of the Psalmist, Ps. lv. 6. It is worthy of remark, that the Holy Spirit not only teaches us to pray for heaven, and helps our infirmities in such prayers, but he bears witness to our souls that we are the heirs of it. Eph. i. 13, 14.

In teaching the Christian how to pray, the Holy Spirit will guide him as to the manner and spirit in which he should approach God. In accomplishing this, he possesses the mind of the true believer with a holy awe when in the Divine presence, and enables him to recollect and practise what David affirms, Ps. lxxxix. 7.

The Spirit also teaches the real believer to be humble in prayer; filling his mind with such a holy shame for sin, and a strong impression of his own weakness, insufficiency, &c.

Again. In conformity to his character as the Spirit of truth, he teaches the saints to pray with unfeigned sincerity: this is highly necessary, because God is a Spirit, &c. John iv. 24. Ps. xvii. 1.

They that pray without the guidance of the Spirit, exercise no patience in waiting for the blessing they ask: in them is exemplified the saying of a good man, "they knock at mercy's door, and run away." Ps. xl. 1.

When the Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray, he influences us to a sincere and unreserved renunciation of our idols. If we approach God with "a divided heart," we shall be found faulty. Hosea x. 2. We should often think on the address of the Prophet Elijah to the house of Israel, 1 Kings xviii. 21, 39. May the Spirit ever lead us to cry, "The Lord, he is the God," &c. and to make every idol in our heart fall before the throne of grace, as Dagon fell before the ark!

3. The Spirit not only excites the Christian to pray, and teaches him to do it, but he affords him special and effectual aid in the exercise.

It is by this that the soul attains a deep sense of the inestimable value of heavenly things, and an ardent desire to possess them: when the Spirit suitably affects the soul with this conviction, then it is induced to plead and wrestle with God, as did the patriarch Jacob, of whom it is said, that "he had power over the angel," &c. Hos. xii. 4. Then his prayers resemble those of his great High-priest. Heb. v. 7.

It is by the Spirit's aid that we obtain enlargement of heart and liberty of expression in prayer. It was for something of this kind that David prayed, Ps. li. 15.

It is only as the Spirit affords his special assistance in prayer, that we practise it with pleasure and delight: then the soul cries out with Asaph, Ps. lxxiii. 28; and with Peter, when on the mount, Matt. xvii. 4. When it is thus with us, we feel a holy ecstasy, a sublime pleasure in our intercourse with our covenant-God.

It is by the agency of the Holy Spirit alone that Christians attain to any composure of mind, or to any devout affections in prayer: when his divine unction is felt, then the chains which bound us to the earth are broken; the tumult which worldly cares had raised in our soul subsides; earthly things cease to attract us; a heavenly calm fills the breast, and a glowing affection towards God.

The Holy Spirit's aid is peculiarly needful so to witness with our spirits that we are the children of adoption, that we may approach God with a strong confidence. Heb. x. 22.

To conclude. The Holy Spirit so helps the infirmities of the saints in prayer, by his unction and power, that the sighs and groans which proceed from them, when agonizing with God in prayer, are spoken of in the text, as his. There is nothing in this idea of the apostle which either tends to supersede the necessity of Christ's intercession, or weaken the believer's attachment to it.

I shall conclude with remarking,

1. That professing Christians should be very careful, that they do not

mistake the fancies and delusions of their own hearts for the influences of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit really make intercession within us, we shall feel a strong hatred to sin, together with an increasing measure of grace and holiness.

2. Let us be constant and diligent in the use of all the means of grace. To suspend a regular attention to those, under pretence of waiting for the motions of the Holy Spirit to excite us to, and aid us in spiritual services, is unscriptural. This remark may be illustrated by the case of Daniel, x. 12—14. In like manner, let us be found occupied in the regular seasons of prayer, and we shall find that God will send his Holy Spirit to help our infirmities.

3. Let us deprecate formal and lifeless prayer. The real Christian knows that there is neither liberty, energy, nor acceptance in prayer, except the Holy Spirit help his infirmities.

4. If the Spirit's helping our infirmities be so important a branch of religion, and so conducive to our growth in grace, and the maintenance of the spirit of prayer, how careful should we be to shun grieving or offending him! 1 Thess. v. 19. Continually see the language of David in prayer. Ps. li. 11.

NECESSITY OF

ADDING DOING TO HEARING.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, &c.—James i. 22.

WE have, at the 15th verse, a very high eulogy given us of the word of God, as that which is the divine seed and principle of the new birth: "Of his own will begat he us." Whereupon the exhortation, "Be swift to hear," is grounded; *i. e.* be very covetous of all seasons to wait upon the dispensations of the word. And then this caution in the text, "But be ye doers of the word." Though hearing the word be the appointed means of this new creation, and is that which, by divine designation, is able to save the soul, by virtue of that efficacy which accompanies it; yet this is not to be understood as if it should do any such work upon those who are hearers only, and no more. Therefore, the apostle gives this intimation, if we expect this glorious effect to be wrought by it, we must be guided and governed by the word: "Be ye doers of the word."

I. The character of those who may be said to be *hearers only*.

By being hearers only, we must not understand every thing to be excluded besides the bare external act of hearing. To be a hearer only, is in the general, to hear without any design of doing at all. Truth is but one, error is manifold. There is but one right end; but various are the ends, and many are the ill principles and dispositions of those who are hearers only. There is,

1. The *inattentive* hearer. "We ought to give the more earnest heed." Heb. ii. 1. "Set your hearts," &c. Deut. xxxii. 46. He who never intends being a doer of what he hears, will probably little regard what he hears.

2. There is the *inconsiderate* hearer, that never ponders what he hears, nor compares one thing with another.

3. The *injudicious* hearer, that never makes any judgment upon what he hears, whether it be true or false; all things come alike to him.

4. The *unapprehensive* hearer, who hears all his days, but is never the wiser: "ever learning." 2 Tim. iii. 7. No light comes into him.

5. The *stupid, unaffected* hearer, that is as a rock and a stone under the word. Nothing enters or gets within; rocks and mountains may shake sooner than he.

6. There are the *prejudiced, disaffected* hearers, who hear with dislike, especially those things which relate to practice; they cannot endure such things as relate to the heart.

7. There are your *fantastical, voluptuous* hearers, that hear only to please their fancy; a pretty sentence, any fine jingle, some flashes of wit, are what they come to hear. The mere gratification of the fancy, in serious matters, is a dismal token. There are, again,

8. The *notional* hearers, who only aim merely to please their fancy; they come to learn some kind of novelty. Nearly allied to these are,

9. Those *talkative* persons, who only come to hear that they may furnish themselves with notions for the sake of discourse. And there are, again,

10. The *ensorious and critical* hearers; who come not as doers of the law, but as judges. And,

Lastly, There are the *malicious* hearers, that come on purpose to seek an advantage against those they come to hear. By this sort our Lord was often pestered. To which may be added, the *raging, exasperated* hearers; such were Stephen's at his last sermon. Thus you see the characters of those who are hearers only.

II. Show what it is to be a doer of the word.

The expression plainly imports a habit. A doer of the word is not one that doeth some single act now and then, which the word enjoins; but whose course and the business of whose life it is to obey the dictates of the word. In the Old Testament, sinners are styled *workers of iniquity*; a course of sin is their trade; hence they are *sin-makers*; they exert all their strength this way. So, in general, we understand a doer of the word; *i. e.* one the business of whose life is to do it continually; and this supposes and includes in it many things.

1. It doth suppose a fixed design, that this shall be my course. Ps. cxix. 106, 112.

2. It carries with it a serious applying of our minds to understand what is the mind and will of God, which is held forth to us in his word. We cannot be doers of the will of God blindly, and in the dark; it is necessary we should understand it first; it is a way we are to walk in with open eyes. "A good understanding." Ps. cxi. 10. We cannot do it without having a right understanding of it.

3. It implies the use of our judgment in hearing the word, in order to distinguish what is human and what is divine. This treasure is conveyed to us in earthen vessels, and will, some way or other, taste of the vessel. Newly-born babes have a kind of discerning if the milk be pure. The desire will be after the sincere milk of the word: "Cannot my

taste discern perverse things?" Job vi. 30. This was the commendation of the Bereans. Acts xvii. 11. And the apostle prays for the Philippians that they might abound in judgment. Chap. i. 9, 10.

4. It requires reverence to be used in hearing: so to hear as that we may be doers, requires a reverential attendance upon it. Considering it as a revelation come from heaven: a divine light shining forth to us. When we consider this word as carrying the stamp of the majesty of God upon it, then it is likely to command the heart.

5. To be a doer of the word, supposes that we believe it; or that our hearing of it is mingled with faith. The word of God worketh effectually in them that believe. 1 Thess. ii. 13. Heb. iv. 2; xi. 1. Rom. i. 16. Again,

6. It requires love. It is said of some, that they received not the love of the truth. 2 Thess. ii. 10. Ps. cxix. 97, 103. Jer. xv. 16. And again,

7. It requires subjection: a compliance of the heart with it. "Receive with meekness." James i. 21. The gracious soul is always ready to say, "Good is the word of the Lord." Again,

8. It requires a previous transformation of the heart by it. The word can never be done by the hearer, but from a vital principle. "Of his own will begat he us." Ver. 18. "You obey from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you," Rom. vi. 17, or into which ye were delivered; *i. e.* ye were cast into the very mould of the word.

9. It requires also a faithful remembrance of it. Verses 23, 24. And,

Lastly. There must be an actual application of all such rules in the word, to present cases, as they occur. "Thy word have I hid in my heart." Ps. cxix. 11.

III. The self-deception of those who are hearers of the word, and not doers of it: "deceiving your own souls."

1. Wherein they are deceived.

(1.) They are deceived in their work. They commonly think they have done well; find no fault with themselves that they have been hearers only.

(2.) As to their reward, they are also deceived; their labour is lost. "Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, shall be blessed in his deed." Ver. 25. Those who are hearers only miss of the blessing.

2. The grossness of this deception. For,

(1.) They are deceived in a plain case. It is the plainest thing in the world, that the gospel is sent for a practical end.

(2.) It is a self-deception. They are said to deceive themselves: they impose on themselves. It is soul-deception: "Deceiving your own souls."

Application.

1. That in the very hearing of the word there is danger of self-deception.

2. We learn that the whole business of the gospel hath a reference to practice: "Be ye doers of the word."

3. If ye would be doers of the word, "Be swift to hear: faith cometh by hearing."

Lastly, It is of the greatest consequence to add doing to hearing :
 “ Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them.” Matt. vii.
 24—27.

FOLLY OF PREFERRING SIN TO AFFLICTION.

Take heed ; regard not iniquity : for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction.—Job xxxvi. 21.

THESE words were addressed to Job, who, from the height of prosperity, was suddenly plunged into the deepest and most complicated distress. They are the words of Elihu, the youngest ; but by far the wisest and most candid of all Job’s friends. The other three were, as he styles them, miserable comforters. It was their belief, that adversity was, in all cases, a certain token of God’s displeasure ; and on this principle they endeavoured to persuade this servant of God, that his whole religion was false and counterfeit ; that Divine justice had now laid hold on him, and that he was suffering the punishment of his hypocrisy.

At length, Elihu interposes : and, moved with zeal for the honour of God, and with compassion for his friend, he unfolds the mysteries of Divine Providence ; asserts and proves that affliction is designed for the trial of the good, as well as for the punishment of the bad ; directs Job to the right improvement of his present distress, and comforts him with the prospect of a happy deliverance, as soon as his heart was moulded into a meek and patient submission. At the same time, he rebukes him with a becoming dignity for some rash and unadvised speeches which the severity of his friends, and the sharpness of his own anguish, had drawn from him, and particularly cautions him in the passage before us : “ Take heed,” &c.

The latter part of the text contains a heavy censure, for which some of Job’s impatient wishes for relief had, no doubt, given too just occasion. But these expressions, uttered in his haste, he afterwards retracted, and finally came out of the furnace of affliction like gold. What I propose, in discoursing on this subject, is, to illustrate and prove the general proposition, that there can be no greater folly than to seek to escape affliction by complying with the temptations to sin ; or, that the smallest act of deliberate transgression is infinitely worse than the greatest calamity we can suffer.

That the greater part of mankind are under the influence of the contrary opinion, may be inferred from their practice. How many have recourse to sinful pleasures to relieve their inward distress ! What unlawful methods do others use, for acquiring the perishing riches or honours of this world ; while, in order to evade suffering for righteousness’ sake, thousands make shipwreck of faith.

In proof, then, of the general proposition, that there can be no greater folly than to choose sin rather than affliction, let it be observed,

I. That sin separates us from God, the only source of real felicity.

Man is not sufficient for his own happiness: a consciousness of this makes men seek resources from abroad, which makes them fly to pleasures and amusements. But these are vain and deceitful refuges of lies; God alone can be the source of real happiness to an immortal soul, an adequate supply to all its faculties, an inexhaustible subject to its understanding, and an everlasting object to its affections.

Sin bereaves the soul of its only portion. Isa. lix. 1, 2. Affliction, on the other hand, instead of separating the soul from God, is often the means of bringing it nearer to him. Let a man be ever so poor, diseased, reproached, persecuted; still, if he hold fast his integrity, if he be a real saint, he is near and dear to God: "The eyes of the Lord are upon him, and the angel of the Lord encampeth round about him;" Ps. xxxiv. 7, and a guard of angels wait to carry him to Abraham's bosom. Luke xvi. 22. Whereas, sin renders us loathsome in the eyes of God. "He is angry with the wicked: their sacrifices are an abomination: he hath bent his bow." When conscience is awake, they think of him with horror, and dare not come into his presence.

II. Affliction may not only consist with the love of a father, but may even be the fruit of it: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." "By this," saith the prophet, speaking of affliction, "shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged." David could say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." A good man may even glory in tribulation. Rom. v. 3, 4. But sin is always both evil in its own nature, and pernicious in its effects. This contrast is very strikingly displayed by St. Paul. Of the one he speaks as a privilege. Phil. i. 29. But what doth he say concerning the other? Rom. vii. 25. If any had reason to complain of the burden of affliction, Paul had more. 2 Cor. xi. 23. But, in the midst of his sufferings, we never heard him cry under the burden, "Who shall deliver me?"

III. Sin is an evil, whether we feel it or not; and worst when we are insensible of it. To be past feeling, in this respect, is the greatest curse. The most desperate condition in which a creature can be placed, before his everlasting doom be pronounced, is, when God saith, as he did of Ephraim, "He is joined to his idols, let him alone." Hos. iv. 17. Affliction on the other hand, though a bitter, is yet a salutary medicine. Heb. xii. 11. Affliction is the discipline by which we are trained to glory, and honour, and virtue. If this world, indeed, were our only portion, there would be some reason, or at least some excuse, for choosing the pleasure of iniquity, rather than these sufferings, which would embitter the short period of our existence in it. But the greatest error we can possibly fall into, is that of taking it for our rest. To cure this fatal mistake, God visits us with afflictions: they are his messengers, sent to teach us our true condition, what this world is, and what we ourselves are in it, "pilgrims and strangers." Heb. xi. 13.

IV. In affliction we are commonly passive, but always active in sin. The one is left to our choice; the other is not. When we suffer in the cause of virtue, we are in the hand of our most faithful and everlasting Friend; but when we sin in order to avoid suffering, we commit ourselves into the hands of that malicious, cunning, and eternal enemy, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour. Afflictions only hurt

the body, but sin affects the health and the well-being of the soul. Which leads me to observe, in the last place,

V. That the evil of affliction is but of short duration, but that of sin perpetual. "Weeping may endure for a night; these light afflictions, which are but for a moment." 2 Cor. iv. 17. Should afflictions continue through our whole life, yet even that is but for a moment; the evil of sin, on the contrary, goes beyond the grave. The delight of it is soon gone, but the sting remains; the guilt and punishment of it will pass with us into the other world, and there constitute the worm that never dieth. Therefore, there can be no greater folly than complying with temptation to sin, in order to avoid affliction.

What hath been said, ought, in the first place, to reprove those, who, so far from considering iniquity as more to be dreaded as a greater evil than affliction, will not refrain, even when their sin proves their affliction. To many it seems their meat and drink: they break through all restraints, when ruin and destruction stare them in the face. Sin has had its martyrs. Let us then be warned against the fatal error referred to in the text, Matt. vii. 26.

Let us examine ourselves carefully, whether our judgment and choice have been rectified on this important point. What is it that most affects us when the hand of the Lord lays heavy upon us? What is the chief object of our ambition; to grow in grace, or be great and prosperous? In what character does Christ appear most amiable, as a Saviour from punishment, or sin? In what view does heaven appear most desirable?

MUTUAL EXHORTATION,

FOUNDED ON THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

But exhort one another daily, &c.—Heb. iii. 13.

THIS is a subject equally applicable to good men and bad: both ought to dread, and both ought to be warned of the deceitfulness of sin. It betrays good men into distress, and bad men into ruin.

I. Endeavour to open a little the chief branches of the deceitfulness of sin.

The deceitfulness of sin appears from its disguising itself, and wholly concealing its nature. David, sensible how often sin is concealed from our own view, exclaims, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." Ps. xix. 12. What ingenious reasonings do men often use with their own minds, to prove the lawfulness of what inclination leads them to, either with respect to profit or pleasure! When the heart pleads the cause, the understanding is a very favourable judge.

For the better illustrating of this truth, observe,

1. This sometimes manifests itself in the prevalence of loose principles. But why is it so readily entertained? Because it either sets men

at liberty from the ties of conscience, and a farther reckoning altogether; or greatly narrows the extent, and weakens the obligations of the law of God. How sweet and palatable to the corrupt mind is every thing that removes restraints! It is not reason, but inclination, that makes proselytes to these doctrines.

2. If we proceed from principles to practice, and from generals to particulars, we shall find how sin disguises itself, and hides its deformity from our view. It never appears in its own proper genuine dress, nor loves to be called by its proper name. Thus, excess and intemperance are called, and unhappily thought by many, a social disposition and good fellowship. Pride and unchristian resentment are called honour, spirit, and dignity of mind. Vain pomp, luxury, and extravagance, are styled taste, elegance, and refinement. Sordid avarice, and love of money, call themselves prudence, frugality, and good management. Levity, folly, and even obscenity, are often called innocent liberty, cheerfulness, and good humour. So great is the deceit, and so secure does the sin lie under its disguise, that even judgment may be denounced against these several vices, and the guilty persons hear with patience or approbation.

This deceit covers itself also by its counterpart. How common is it to stigmatize and disparage true piety by the most opprobrious titles! Tenderness of conscience is, by many, reproached under the character of preciseness and narrowness of mind. Zeal against sin, and fidelity to the souls of others, are called sourness and ill-nature. There was never yet a faithful reprovcr, from Lot in Sodom, to the present day, but he suffered under reproach and slander from those who would not be reclaimed. Many there are, who are far from thinking it themselves, and yet fall under the denunciation of the prophet. Isa. i. 20—24.

But the highest degree of the deceitfulness of sin, is, when it not only puts on a decent and lawful appearance, but assumes the garb of eminent piety. There is nothing impossible in this. As Satan sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light, so some of the greatest sins will take the name, and arrogate the honour of the most distinguished virtue.

The cross of our blessed Master is full-fraught with instructions of this kind. His enemies, who persecuted him with unrelenting malice through his life, and at last prevailed to have him hanged on a tree, did it, some, no doubt, from a pretended, but, many of them, from a misguided zeal for religion. He was crucified as a deceiver and blasphemer; and that in this they were misled, appears from the language of the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Luke xxiii. 34. What a conviction should this give us of the deceitfulness of sin; and how often hath our Saviour's predictions been fulfilled! John xvi. 2. How great is the deceitfulness of sin in the human heart that can make men suppose that such atrocious crimes are acceptable to God!

Nor is this all. In the above cases sins are changed into duties, and in many others, duties are changed into sins, by the perversion of the principle from which they ought to flow. How great then the deceitfulness of sin!

In the next place the deceitfulness of sin appears from its forming

excuses for itself, and thereby extenuating its guilt. On our first parents being challenged for their disobedience, they confess the fact, but immediately add an excuse. Gen. iii. 11, 12. One excuse is, no other than the commonness of sin: sinners take encouragement because there are multitudes in the same condition. Others make excuse for their sins, that they are comparatively small. To all such we may apply the words of the apostle, 2 Cor. x. 12.

The deceitfulness of sin farther appears by its insinuating nature, whereby it leads men on, in an insensible manner, from one degree of wickedness to a higher. Take the most abandoned sinner in this guilty world, and there was a time in his life when he would have trembled to think of the crimes which he afterwards committed. Thus, Hazael, when he was told by the prophet of the barbarity and cruelty he would be guilty of, answered, with a kind of abhorrence, "What! is thy servant a dog?" Then sin deceives and hardens the heart whilst the sinner can go on in sin without remorse or shame; yea, glory in his wickedness, and esteem it honourable. Phil. iii. 18, 19. 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

And now view, and view with terror, the dreadful consequences of the deceitfulness of sin, and by what fatal steps it led on to that hardness of heart, which is a sure prelude of eternal misery.

II. The duty which is founded by the apostle on the deceitfulness of sin, viz. mutual exhortation: "Exhorting one another daily."

1. As to the persons who are obliged to exhort others. It seems in this passage to be laid on Christians in general. "Exhort one another." Agreeably to this, we find frequent mention of this duty: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart." Lev. xix. 17. Prov. ix. 8. Phil. ii. 4. Heb. x. 24.

2. The season in which the duty of mutual exhortation is to be performed: "Daily, while it is called to-day;" *i. e.* frequently and without delay. Eccl. ix. 10. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

The manner.

1. In the spirit of love and meekness. No railing nor reviling expressions, which will look like the wounds of an enemy to destroy, and not the balm of a physician to cure. Gal. vi. 1. Our own infirmities should fill us with compassion as much as resentment against sinners. Meek and gentle admonitions will penetrate the heart. Prov. xv. 1; xxv. 15.

2. With some degree of zeal. We should avoid the extreme of remissness as well as severity.

3. With humility. Whilst we exhort others, we should ever keep in view our own imperfections, and be ready to acknowledge them: "Confess your faults one to another."

To conclude.

1. From what has been said, we may see the depravity of our nature. It is the language of scripture, it is the language of experience, and it is a parent of humility. For the deceitfulness of sin is another expression of the treachery of the human heart.

2. Let it lead us to strictness and frequency in self-examination. Self-knowledge is a study of great difficulty and importance. "Examine yourselves." 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

THE DESIRES OF THE CHRISTIAN AND THE MAN OF THE WORLD CONTRASTED.

There be many that say, Who will show us any good? &c.—Ps. iv. 6, 7.

THE chief distinction between a child of God and a man of the world, lies in the prevailing tendency of their desires. Both of them are engaged in the pursuit of happiness; but the one aims at nothing higher than the present gratification of his appetites; while the other aims above this world, and aspires at the supreme felicity of his immortal nature. The one seeks information from every quarter concerning the object of his pursuit; the other asks the blessing from the Giver of all good. The one seeks a happiness separate from God. The whole earth, without the light of God's countenance, would be a barren wilderness, a place of exile. In discoursing on this subject,

Make a few remarks on the Psalmist's description of these two opposite characters. Worldly men have little cause to rejoice in the temporal advantages which they enjoy; and the light of God's countenance is sufficient to gladden the heart of a saint of God in every circumstance.

The illustration of these propositions may give rise to some practical improvement.

1. Attend to the description of worldly men: "There be many," &c.

1. This question betrays a great dissatisfaction and perplexity. They ask not for the chief good, but any good; any thing to fill up the craving vacuity of their minds: this shows their perplexity.

2. The only good they inquire after is some sensible good. Who will show us some object of sense? strangers to the power of faith, the substance, they only look at things that are seen. Their views are confined.

3. They make no discrimination of their object; they seek after any good; good food, clothing, bargain, estate; any good, provided it affords them present gratification. Matt. vi. 31.

4. Amidst all their dissatisfaction with their present state, and their eager desires for something better, they do not turn their thoughts at all to God; they seek counsel from others. Such is the representation the Psalmist gives of the temper and language of the men of the world in his day; and he farther adds, that the character of which he gives this description was a common one: "there be many." And is it not too apparent that multitudes in our day answer the above description? no relish for spiritual and divine things, but ever say, "What shall we eat?" "Who will show us any good?"

Let us turn our attention towards a different object, and consider the temper of a child of God. While others are saying, "Who," &c. the language of his soul is, "Lord, lift up the light," &c. verse 6. He too seeks good; the desire of happiness is common to all. But observe,

1. It is not any good. He cannot feed on husks; he is for real, sub-

stantial good. The creature, he knows, is a broken cistern : he is for a permanent good, suited to the vast desires of the soul.

2. He knows where that good is to be found ; he needs not solicit information. He knows that the favour of God, and the sense of his loving-kindness, are the only source of happiness ; there, then, he fixeth his choice. Ps. lvii. 7 ; cviii. 1.

The worldly mind is in a state of perpetual fluctuation. The enlightened mind sees vanity written on all creature comfort, and therefore looks beyond and above these : " Whom have I in heaven ? " &c. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

3. Goes directly to God himself, and begs the blessing promised ; loses no time : flies to his heavenly Father ; claims nothing as a debt. Prov. xviii. 10.

4. It deserves our notice, that the Psalmist uses this prayer in direct opposition to the carnal language of worldly men, who are continually saying, " Who will show us any good ? " &c. hereby intimating, that a child of God can relish sweetness in no inferior good, without the light of God's countenance. When this is enjoyed, nothing comes amiss ; without this, he mourns in the height of prosperity ; enjoying this, he rejoices in adversity. To a spiritual man, the favour of God is " the one thing needful."

II. Illustrate the proposition which arises from the comparison.

Worldly men have little cause to rejoice in their temporal advantage.

Stretch your imaginations to the utmost bounds of worldly grandeur. What doth this amount to ?

1. May not all this consist with the present misery of the person ? Unless you can finish the picture of the prosperous man, by saying, his soul is as flourishing as his body, " he is wretched and miserable." Rev. iii. 17.

2. Frequently a means of making a man more miserable. Many have been fruitful in the low valley of adversity.

3. All this may end in misery. " In hell he lift up his eyes." Luke xvi. 23.

Let us turn our eyes to a more agreeable object, and consider the solid grounds of joy the believer enjoys.

1. He possesses that joy which results from comparing his present state with his former. He remembers the time when he wandered, inquiring, " Who will show me any good ? " As a sheep astray, now returned ; as the manslayer, got within the city ; now the Lord smiles on him, and he can say, Isa. xii. 1, 2.

2. The source of joy to a child of God, consists in the honours and privileges conferred on him : " Access to God : "—" All are yours." Rom. v. 1, 2 ; 1 Cor. iii. 21.

3. The saint of God, from a contemplation of future blessedness, can look forward. " Things to come are his ; " " to live is Christ, to die is gain." " Beloved, now are we the sons of God," &c. " Blessed be the God and Father," &c. 1 John iii. 2. 1 Pet. i. 3. To conclude.

1. Let us inquire, which of these characters belong to us. What are your hearts most set upon ?

2. You who are carnally minded, think reasonably on your condition. What are you pursuing ? Isa. lv. 2, 3.

3. Those of you who have been taught to value the light of God's countenance, often recollect the mercy manifested. "Who made you to differ? Walk worthy of the Lord; as many as walk according to this rule," &c. Gal. vi. 16.

SUCCESS FROM GOD ALONE.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, &c.
Eccl. ix. 11.

THERE are two things which often occur to our observation in the course of providence, that tend to puzzle and perplex the mind; one is, that Providence makes so little difference between good men and bad men; that here the best men sometimes meet with as afflictive providences as the worst. This is what Solomon remarks, verse 2, "All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." This was the thing that perplexed the Psalmist. Ps. lxxiii.

The other is, that the most likely and promising means of obtaining an end are many times disappointed; and the more weak and least likely means prove successful: "I returned and saw under the sun;" that limits the observation to worldly matters.

As to spiritual and eternal matters, the most certain connexion is established between the means and the end. "He that believeth shall be saved;" Mark xvi. 16; and those "that by patient continuance in well-doing seek," shall most certainly obtain "eternal life." But as to the things of this life, "time and chance (or occurrence) happeneth to them all;" not an uncertain chance is intended, but such as is ruled and ordered by God. What was chance to others, was the Lord to Job. Job i. 21.

Our text is by no means designed to discourage us from using proper means, only to caution us from relying too much upon them. In general, it may be said, "the diligent hand maketh rich;" Prov. x. 4; as well as "the blessing of God maketh rich." x. 22. We have no reason to expect success without diligence; for "the idle soul shall suffer hunger." Prov. xix. 15.

I. Prove and illustrate the assertion, "The race is not to the swift." Those that run the fastest do not always obtain the prize, nor those who are strongest always gain the victory; success is not always on the side of the swift and strong. Asahel, who was light of foot as a wild roe, was slain by Abner in a pursuit. The swift shall not flee away, nor the mighty man escape. "Nor the battle to the strong." Rabshakeh telleth us, "that counsel and strength are for the war." 2 Kings xviii. 20. But many times great strength is foiled, and a small army overcomes a greater. The strength of the mighty doth not always avail them; sometimes one hath slain a thousand. A large host of Philistines were put to flight by Jonathan and a few men; Goliath slain by David; and Gideon, with a little army of three hundred, routed the prodigious host of the Midianites and Amalekites, and all the children

of the East. Judges vii. 12. And we are told, "There is no king saved by the multitude of his host; and a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many, or by few." 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

"Nor yet bread to the wise." Bread is put for all means of subsistence. The most ingenious artist, and he who best understands his profession, do not always prosper the most; wise men are sometimes hard put to it. "Folly is set in great dignity, when the wise sit in low places." Eccl. x. 6.

"Nor riches to men of understanding." We often see this verified: the learned are poor, whilst those of a less understanding have great substance. We read of the rich fool, and poor wise man, and, in general, that it is "the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich." Prov. x. 22.

"Nor favour to men of skill." To obtain favour with men, it availeth not to be skilful, that is, able and well experienced; men of no desert are promoted, as Doeg by Saul. Men of genius and wisdom are often neglected.

II. Whence cometh it to pass, that the most likely means fail of success?

This is certainly owing to the overruling providence of God: "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." Eph. i. 11. If he please, the weak shall be as David, and the walls of Jericho shall fall at the blast of rams' horns; or, if he please, "the men of might shall not find their hands." How easy can the Lord disappoint the best-laid schemes, and the most promising of all human endeavours! "Promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west." Ps. lxxv. 6.

The Lord has an absolute power over the whole material world: "Fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storm fulfil his word." What dependence, therefore, can there be upon nature, without the God of nature? on any creature, without the blessing of the Creator? The race is by no means certain to the swift, for God can weaken his strength in the way, and cause him to stumble and fall. Nor is the "battle to the strong." "The very stars in their courses shall fight against Siserā." Judges v. 20. A horse is a vain thing for safety by land, and so is also a ship at sea, without the favour and protection of God; if he commandeth and raiseth up the stormy wind, the mariners are at their wits' end.

God has likewise an absolute power over the minds of men. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord;" Prov. xxi. 1; and so is the heart of every man. He can "turn the counsel of Ahitophel into foolishness." He can cause our enemies to be at peace with us; or he can cause our friends to become our enemies. And if God do not give us favour in the eyes of men, their friendship will fail us.

III. We may suggest, or at least guess at, some reasons why the Lord thus orders it.

It may appear strange to us, why success is not always answerable to the means. But God, who seeth not as man seeth, has certainly wise reasons to order it sometimes otherwise. May we not humbly guess at such reasons as these?

1. To humble the pride and arrogance of men, and to convince them

of the vanity of their confidence in any power but God's. Pharaoh says, "I will pursue." God will let Pharaoh, and all Egypt, and all Israel know, that it is not for man to talk thus proudly: "he resisteth the proud." 1 Pet. v. 5.

2. God may thus frustrate the success of means, to convince men of his overruling providence. Did success always and in all cases answer to natural means, the providence of God would not be so copious in his government of the world. Men would ascribe all to means, and nothing to God.

3. Another reason may be, to encourage our trust in him, even when we have little prospect of success. It is in such a case a comfortable thought, that "the race is not always to the swift."

Use.

1. If there be such an uncertainty in human affairs and human events, let this teach us to look after those better blessings which we may surely obtain; that good part which shall never be taken from us. There are sure mercies: here, as to worldly matters, "the race is not always to the swift:" but in the spiritual race, we may so run that we may assuredly obtain; all who run with patience surely obtain the prize. "Here the battle is not always to the strong;" but all who "fight the good fight of faith shall lay hold of eternal life." Here, "bread is not always to the wise; therefore, labour not for the meat that perisheth, but labour for the meat that endureth to everlasting life. Ask, and you shall receive." In this world, riches are not always to men of understanding; but hearken to Christ's counsel, "Come, and buy of me gold tried in the fire." His righteousness and the graces of his Spirit, shall make you rich towards God. Here, again, "favour is not always to men of skill;" the favour of man is uncertain and precarious, but so is not the favour of God: "I love them that love me." When all forsake us, he will stand by us. "I will never turn away from them to do them good." Jer. xxxii. 40.

2. Let us learn from the text, not to be too confident of the success of any worldly undertaking. "Who is he that says, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?" Lam. iii. 37. We hope, we fear, what may be; but God only knows what will be. "We are but of yesterday."

3. This also shows the folly of sin, of undertaking anything without acknowledging the Lord: "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow." James iv. 13—15. "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee." Job xxii. 27, 28.

PETER'S FALL, AND THE MEANS OF HIS RECOVERY.

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.—Luke xxii. 61. The whole period runs thus, verses, 61, 62.

THERE is scarcely a more affecting narrative in all the sacred history than this of Peter's fall; nor a more moving circumstance in the whole nar-

rative, than the remarkable manner of his recovery, contained in the words now read.

I. Offer some remarks on the most memorable circumstances in Peter's fall.

1. It was occasioned by his being secure in bad company, verse 55. A double snare! A man can hardly be in a more dangerous situation; and into this we see Peter willingly thrust himself, John xviii. 18, 25; which was the source of all his subsequent sin and sorrow. When we are providentially thrown into the company of the wicked, sensible of our danger, on our guard, we may escape with clean hands. If we prefer bad company, be insensible of our danger from it, and grow secure in it, we are then like mariners among the shelves, in a dark and troubled sea.

2. It was occasioned by the first temptation, and that no great one. Disarmed by his carnal security, he makes no resistance to the very first attack. A girl suspected him to be a Galilean, charged him with it, and he immediately denied: "I am not." Verse 58. Is this the great Christian champion? the hero of the apostles? the man who had so vehemently affirmed, "he would sooner die?" How ignorant was Peter of his weakness! that ignorance produced his confidence, that confidence his security, and that security his fall. When these three meet, they give a very bad disposition to the mind: the concurrence of these betrayed the resolute apostle: "Let him that standeth," &c. 1 Cor. x. 12.

3. We see, from this history, how naturally sin hardeneth the heart and stupifies the conscience. Peter denied his Master twice, after the first crowing of the cock had brought him to a sense of his sin. Mark xiv. 68. This was the very token given him; but his heart was now hardened, and twice after he denied him with oaths.

4. How naturally one sin draws on another! Peter's first crime was carnal confidence: what a train of miscarriages this draws after it! led him first to contradict his Master; to venture into the worst of company; from that to the denying of his Master. The first denial made way for the second, that for a third, and that, too, with oaths. Thus sin not only hardens, but emboldens in the way of transgression.

5. The fairest warnings will not prevent, nor the fittest means recover us from sinning, without Divine aid. Peter, one would think, had warning enough. Our Lord foretold him, but to no purpose. He heard the cock crow, the very signal given, but without effect; and we have reason to suppose that all other methods had proved as ineffectual, had not the "Lord turned and looked upon him." Oh, what a look was that! The cock crowed the second time, after Peter had denied him thrice. But that second alarm would have had no more impression than the first, had not Christ that moment cast his eye upon him. As if he had said, "Dost thou hear that, Peter? Now, whose words are true, thine or mine?" That look he could not withstand; one look from Christ subdued him, conquered, softened, melted, sunk him. His sorrows like a deluge, brake in and overwhelmed him. He could no longer forbear; but, like Joseph, suddenly left his company, retired to pour out the fulness of his soul, "and wept bitterly." Matt. xxvi. 75.

All this can one look from Jesus do! When all human means fail, how easily can divine grace touch the sinner's heart! The cock might

crow in vain, were it not for a glance from the eye of Christ. "Christ turned and looked upon Peter, and he wept." Luke xxii. 61. Oh, what compassion and love, what tenderness and pity did Peter see in that single glance!

That look spoke all his heart; there was heaven and mercy in his eyes; which quite vanquished the apostle and deluged him in tears. It is related that he often afterwards wept, when he adverted to this circumstance.

These are some of the most memorable circumstances in Peter's fall, and the proper observations that may be made thereupon. This instructive piece of history is recorded by all the four evangelists, for our caution. If we take not warning, we are no less inexcusable. Let us be afraid of bad company. Beware of self-confidence. Be watchful against all sin; and be humbly suppliant for, and dependent on divine grace to prevent and recover us.

II. The means of Peter's recovery; intimated in the words of the text, "And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter."

Though all the four evangelists relate this affecting story, yet only St. Luke takes notice of this particular circumstance of Christ's turning and looking upon him, which was the means of his repentance. Let us consider what there might be in this single look that had so sudden and great effect on Peter.

1. We may conceive it to be a look of reproof and resentment. The cock crew; and immediately Christ turned, as if he had said, "Hearest thou that well-known signal? What thinkest thou now? Now where is all thy boasted confidence and courage? Art thou the man who declared thou wouldst sooner die? What! is all thy forward talk and flaming zeal come to this?" A look from Christ, which carried in it so just a reprimand, must be supposed to enter deep into Peter's heart; who still respected his Master, though fear had caused him to act this base part.

2. We may suppose it also to be a look of tender compassion; a look of love, that carried in it melting mercy, and the pity of a friend. As if he had said, "Dost thou hear that, Peter? Unhappy creature! where art thou now? How couldst thou be so confident? I well knew thy weakness. Thou knowest not thyself. But is this thy kindness to thy friend? Have I deserved this at thy hands?" When Julius Cæsar was murdered in the senate-house, his friend Brutus gave him one stab among the rest; which entered deeper into the dying emperor's heart than all he had received before, and made him cry out, "What, my dear Brutus among my murderers!" Something so touching we may conceive to have been in that gracious look. "What, Peter among my persecutors! Could I expect this from thee? I could bear it better from any other. And, believe it, thy treachery, profaneness, and apostasy, have more sensibly afflicted me, than all the indignities I have met with."

3. From the effect it had upon Peter we may understand it to be a reconciling look. Not a wrathful, vindictive power; but an overture of peace and pardon conveyed by the eye to the heart: "Ah! Peter, I will not disown thee, though thou hast denied me: though thou hast for-

saken me, I cannot cast thee off. How do I pity thee? Behold these eyes; dost thou not see something of pity and tenderness there? Believe me, thou hast not yet lost all thine interest in me. I have prayed for thee, and the blood I am going to shed shall atone for thy guilt; nor will I appear before my Father as thine enemy." No wonder Peter could not withstand such a look.

4. We may view this turn of the eye as a look of exhortation. "Does not that crowing of the cock bring my words to thy mind? Do not drive back the conviction as thou didst at first. Go, think on what I said, and on what thou hast done: repent, and weep, and mourn. Remember the look which I now give thee, and remember it is a mercy I ever looked on thee more. Thou hast denied me: if thou now lovest me, let thy repentance be as remarkable as thy fall."

5. Lastly. With this look we must suppose the grace of repentance was actually bestowed. It is not altogether the moving language of his Master's eye, but the grace conveyed with it at the same time, that mollified Peter's heart, and wrought so sudden and mighty a change there.

The effect of this grace appeared in his after conduct; in his modesty, humility and self-diffidence. John xxi. 17.

Our blessed Lord, in his present situation, had not an opportunity of personal converse with Peter; if he had, we may suppose he would have addressed him in some such manner as hath now been described, in a way of reproof, compassion, comfort, and exhortation.

But all this he might convey with one steady cast of the eye, and doubtless he did, with that converting look he gave to Peter. There is something in a fixed, commanding look, that is inexpressibly more eloquent than all the arts of speech. There is no resisting the silent language of the eye, when dictated by the oratory of the heart: and such a look undoubtedly this was that pierced through Peter's heart, and forced all his sorrows through his eyes.

III. Conclude with a few general remarks upon the subject.

1. We have a very moving instance of the great compassion of our blessed Lord to all his weak, backsliding servants. The tenderness he showed to this fallen disciple was no singularity in his temper; he is in like manner affected to them all in like circumstances. He considers their frame: he is not severe to mark their failings: he is not a stranger to temptation: he knows how to pity and succour them that are tempted. And what more powerful motive can be urged to excite them to return to their duty than this, that Christ remembers them still, is grieved for their backslidings, and desires, and looks and waits for their repentance?

2. Let not this instance of Peter's fall and sudden repentance lead any to make bold with sin, or to presume on the grace of God for their recovery: in reason it ought not. But, on the contrary, if we take the circumstances of the whole story together, and duly consider them, we shall see cause to increase our guard and vigilance. If so eminent a servant of Jesus Christ as Peter fell so low, and by one incautious step was betrayed into so grievous a transgression, alas! what have we not to fear? The case of Peter is set up as a sea-mark, to warn us of the fatal shelves: and shall this single instance of one who hath suffered

shipwreck there, and escaped with his life, embolden us to come near them? Would not this be the extreme of folly? If our Lord mercifully restored one disciple who denied him, he finally gave over another who betrayed him. Let us dread every presumptuous sin as the most fatal snare.

3. From what hath been said we may infer, that if Christ be so ready to restore backsliding saints, he is willing to receive repenting sinners. He who shows so much compassion for his fallen servants, that turns so moving and pitying a look after them when they are going astray from him, can we imagine he has no kind regard for those who are coming over to him? Will not the same grace that restores the one receive the other? This subject is applicable for the comfort of repenting sinners, as for the encouragement of returning saints. The parable of the prodigal son is very pertinent for this purpose.

4. We may observe, though divine grace be the first and efficient cause of a sinner's repentance, yet it does not work on his mind in a compulsive or mechanical manner, but by means of his own serious thought, reason, and reflection. Thus David, "I thought on my way." Ps. cxix. 59. So the grace of Christ which wrought so mightily on Peter first set him on thinking and reflecting. And "Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and he went out and wept."

5. Lastly. Notwithstanding the great compassion of Christ to thoughtless sinners and revolting saints, yet he neither will nor can save them without repentance; Peter could not be restored to favour without this. Jesus desires, invites to repentance; affords every help. "Except ye repent." Luke xiii. 3.

STEADINESS IN RELIGION

RECOMMENDED FROM THE EXAMPLE OF DANIEL.

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, &c.—Dan. vi. 10.

You have here the example of a man who ventured all his interest in this world to preserve it in another; and ran the hazard of losing his life, that he might save it to life eternal. The words consist of two parts:

I. The difficulty he was brought into, when he knew that the writing was signed.

Give some few thoughts of the case itself, that made his duty so dangerous to him. We find it originated,

1. In the honour that had been conferred upon Daniel: we are told of his advancement, verses 1, 2. That king was unconfined in the distribution of his favours, and resolved never to lose the service of an honest man, for the sake of any varieties in religion.

The reason of Daniel having this place shows how little bigotry was concerned in his promotion. Verse 3. Nor is it any wonder that Darius should be so early with his honours to this great man, if you do but consider what a long reputation he had possessed in Babylon. He was

prepared by as good an education as Nebuchadnezzar could give him. Chap. i. 20; ii. 48, 49; iv. 9.

It is certain he had some public office in Belshazzar's time. Chap. viii. 1, 2. It is probable he was afterwards out of place, and seems determined against one, by his answer to the king, chap. v. 17. Belshazzar speaks to him as one that had been a long while out of his presence, verse 13. This looks as if he had been for some time laid aside from honour: but a very solemn providence brought him in, to read the handwriting on the wall, that confounded the jest of drinking wine in the vessels of the temple. Thus does God bring men under a necessity of advancing the very persons whom they hate: "This honour have all the saints."

2. The uneasiness it gave some great men at court, ver. 4.

This might be from the desire of getting into his place: "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who can stand before envy?" Prov. xxvii. 4. That is a passion never to be conquered, because it grows upon a person doing well. What need have good people to be looking out after a better world! How bitter an imagination does it give us of duty, or public zeal, to have it so ill received: that a man's usefulness is his guilt, and he shall provoke by all the measures he takes to oblige! But there is a state where obedience will sit easier upon ourselves and those about us.

Or, it may be, these presidents and princes had a mind to be more at liberty than Daniel's inspection would allow. They did not like the integrity of a man whose character answered his condition, that the king should have damage in nothing. The getting him turned out would give them an opportunity of revelling in dishonest gain; and, upon these motives, they are in a general design against him. He must be thrown out upon a religious test; which though it was an instance of their wickedness, yet leaves an honour upon him that was to suffer by it. It is an argument those persons are blameless in their office, whom nothing but a new law can turn out of it. Thus it was here; they come to Darius with the usual compliment: "O king, live for ever!" &c. Verses 6—8. The pretence of this was, that it would make for the king's honour, and give him an advantage of endearing himself to his new people: "thus was loyalty a cloak of wickedness." Prov. xxix. 12.

That the king was drawn into this by a mere error, appears from the honest, unaffected pain that it gave him, verse 14. Thus does a hasty resolution make work for a slow repentance! but he was "ensnared with the words of his mouth."

Now it is out of his power to help the person who had served him best. He sees the intrigue when it was too late; his favourite, his counsellor, and the greatest friend of the empire, must be given up to the lions. What a melancholy time this proved to Darius! Verses 18—20. Thus you see this statute was agreed to by persons of different views: the princes, for their own ends, drew in the king to sacrifice the most able and upright counsellor in his dominions.

II. His behaviour upon it: "When he knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house," &c. Dan. vi. 10.

1. As to the place of his worshipping God, it was in his own house.

They had no other temples in Babylon, and were a great way off from that city and fabric where God had fixed his name. But neither his blessing nor their duty was confined there; as it was happily observed in the consecration of that Temple, that "the heaven of heavens could not contain, how much less this house." 1 Kings viii. 27. Though Daniel lived in a house suitable to his quality, as being the chief minister of state, yet he does not think it too good for a course of religion. He had other cares upon him above those of the kingdom: wherever he is an inhabitant, he will be a suppliant.

2. The manner of his worship is very remarkable: "his windows were opened in his chamber towards Jerusalem." Dan. vi. 10. This was not to give his enemies an advantage of seeing him; for it is no man's duty to court his own danger; nor was it any new thing; for it is said that "he prayed and gave thanks before his God as he did aforetime." And least of all can we suppose that he did it from any low thoughts of the Divine omniscience or favour, as if a prayer was easier to be heard from an open window, or went out under an advantage by being pointed to such a quarter; no, he knew that he had to deal with a God whose "presence fills the heaven and earth," Jer. xxiii. 24, and valued not which way his eyes were turned.

(1.) It was complying with the original terms of the consecration. 1 Kings viii. 46—49. Nay, before this, David said, "I will worship towards thy holy temple." Ps. v. 7; cxxxviii. 2.

(2.) It was to show his faith and hope of the people's return thither; according to that direction of Jeremy, whose writings Daniel was often perusing, "Remember the Lord afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind." Jer. li. 50. God had told them that he would "bring back their captivity; that Jerusalem should be the throne of the Lord;" Jer. iii. 17; though it was a long time without inhabitant, yet the "remnant should return, even the remnant to the mighty God;" Isa. x. 20—22; he therefore takes his daily looks that way, under an assurance that the Lord would "perform that good thing to the house of Israel."

And as he believed it, so by this you see how heartily he wished for it: as Jerusalem was his chiefest joy in prosperity, so it is his dearest care in a time of trouble.

(3.) There he knew that the Messiah was to come: "He of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write." Whether this matter happened before that prayer of his in the ninth chapter, I cannot tell; but it is plain they could not be far asunder; for that was in the year of Darius, and therefore I think it not improbable that the angel Gabriel might have appeared to him before this plot of the princes took effect. Dan. ix. 21. So that he opened his windows that way, "in hope of the promises made of God unto their fathers." Acts xxvi. 6. If you take this sense of the words, it lets you see that good people in those ages came to God by a Mediator: their religion was a "looking to Jesus."

3. The frequency of his worship: "he kneeled upon his knees three times a day." The scripture hath hinted at this circumstance with a great deal of propriety. Ps. xcii. 2. This shows him to be a man like

Enoch, who "walked with God;" his general life was under that regulation. Daniel had found the good of this method before; it was by his own prayer, and the concurrence of his partners, that he obtained the revelation of the king's secret; it was his usual business to kneel three times a day.

4. The nature of his worship, the parts that it consisted of: "he prayed and gave thanks." Here was work enough for prayer, to be "delivered from the ungodly," and have his soul brought out of all adversity; that petition would have suited his case, Ps. cxli. 9, 10. But one would think that there could be no praises, no giving of thanks expected from a man on the brink of the lions' den. But,

As no trouble can make the believer miserable, so none should make him silent: he hath mercies to own of a greater sort than can be taken from him here. The losing of honour, interest, and life itself, draws no ill consequence along with it upon holiness, joy, and "the inheritance reserved in heaven for us." 1 Pet. i. 4. We may go through the fire, shouting in the prospect of what comes after it. When persecution hath taken away all we can lose, there is still a reserve that will oblige us to eternal praises.

The custom he observed. It was what he did aforetime: not an unusual heat that this new danger had put him into: this was his way when he "sat in the gate of the king." He came down from the dignity of a president to the humility of a petitioner. Greatness does not run away with his thoughts and time: though he had the accounts of a hundred and twenty princes to settle, yet he vows to have leisure enough for his God: "Thus happy is the man that fears always." Prov. xxviii. 14.

Improvement.—1. No prospect of loss or danger ought to hinder a good man in the course of duty that he owes to God. If I cannot have the blessings of both worlds, I will make sure of the better; and in all the miseries of a desert, "my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness." Ps. lxiii. 5.

2. Your troubles call you to use your satisfaction in the Divine providence. Do you believe that God governs the world? Must there not be some use for your faith in his providence, as well as in his promise? You depend upon him for another world, and so you must for a good journey through this. Ps. xlviii. 14.

Here is now a contest between my duty and interest: the former is plain to me, the latter under a cloud. Let me then take the surer side: I may better trust Providence in a way of duty than out of it: withdrawing myself from the obedience I owe to him, is casting him off. And what! shall I depend upon his goodness to feed me, when I deny his authority to rule me?

Lastly. The consequence of Daniel's persecution.

1. His miraculous preservation: "God sent his angel, and closed the mouths of the lions." Dan. vi. 22. The brutes in the den were easier to him than those in the court; there goes more to the turning of a politician than the muzzling of a lion.

2. The punishment of his enemies. The lions, who were under a restraint to Daniel, are at liberty when his accusers were tumbling down;

for, "they brake their bones before they could reach the bottom of the pit." Dan. vi. 24. Thus did God "plead the cause of his servant's reproach."

3. His own advancement. He is restored to his dignity again. So that you see the believer serves a good Master: losing any thing for him is but putting it out to usury: we receive in "this world an hundred fold, and in the world to come life everlasting." Luke xviii. 30. And how different is the figure that Daniel made upon his restoration, from what it would have been had he evaded the law.

4. It ended in the greater advancement of religion. Verses 26, 27. And, doubtless, this was dearer to the good man than any other benefits of his escape.

OF FOLLOWING THE LORD FULLY.

Followed me fully.—Num. xiv. 24.

IN these words we have God's approbation of Caleb, accepting his faithful service in the testimony he gave of the good land; encouraging the hearts of his people to go into it. "But my servant Caleb." It is a great honour to be a servant of God. It is mentioned as a privilege of those "who were come out of much tribulation, that they should serve." "My servant:" he hath showed himself such—"another spirit." The spirits of the rest were base and cowardly—"and hath followed me fully."

I would recommend to your imitation this illustrious servant of the most high God. For if we wish to be rewarded as he was we must walk in his steps, and do as he did: "follow the Lord fully." Consider,

I. What we are to understand by "following the Lord fully." Observe,

In general, no man can "follow the Lord" at all, till once he be acquainted with him; "for he that cometh to God must believe that he is." Heb. xi. 6. Before "we follow the Lord," we must not only know that he is supreme, and hath a right to command; but we must believe that he is worthy to command. Two things we must be thoroughly persuaded of: that the laws of Christ are righteous and good, and that he is both able and willing to protect us in his service.

Had we never offended God, these views might have been sufficient to engage us in his service and "follow him fully." But as we are guilty creatures, some scheme of grace must be opened to our view, by which pardon is dispensed to the guilty. We must not only know that such a scheme exists, but we must approve, and know that we are interested therein: thus being prepared to "follow the Lord fully." Consider the duty as including the following particulars:

1. That we acknowledge no other Lord besides him: one Lord we must have. Man was made to serve him. "No man can serve two opposite masters;" Matt. vi. 24; Luke xvi. 13: therefore, to follow the Lord fully, is to follow him only.

2. It is to obey him without reserve—an affectionate and liberal heart. Unless we follow the Lord in all things, we cannot be truly said to follow him in any thing; “he that offended in one point.” We must follow him through the rugged paths of self-denial and mortification, as well as in the most smooth and delightful ways. “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do, and what shall I render?” should be our language.

3. “To follow the Lord fully,” is to follow him openly, and in the face of the world; we must not think of stealing to heaven, as if we were ashamed to be seen in, or of the family to which we belong. Mark viii. 38.

There are two extremes in which people are apt to run: both ought to be guarded. Some proclaim their religion on the house-top; this our Saviour condemns, Matt. vi. 1—18; others, again, from a false modesty and bashfulness, or perhaps from a dislike of ostentation and hypocrisy, go to the opposite extreme, they hide their light. They go as far as they dare into a servile compliance with the world. The duty we are recommending is at an equal distance from both these extremes. He who “follows the Lord fully,” keeps the laws of his Master always in full view. It is a small thing with him to be judged with man’s judgment; he endeavours so to speak, and so to act, as to please not man, but God. To “let his light shine.” He is alarmed at that declaration, “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me.” Mark viii. 38. If we would “follow the Lord fully,” we must confess him openly; we must be “blameless and harmless.”

4. It is to cleave to him stedfastly, when others forsake him: when exposed by his service to the world’s hatred. It was on account of this that Caleb obtained the title of a man of another spirit. He was not only singular, but it drew on him the resentment of his brethren on the point of stoning him.

Thus it was Caleb “followed the Lord fully.” And thus must we do if we would have his reward. We must not shrink from persecution, should it be our lot; “but rather rejoice.” Matt. v. 12. If we would “follow the Lord fully,” we must persevere in this duty.

II. Press the duty by some motives and arguments.

1. If we would be honest men and Christians indeed, we must “follow the Lord fully.” So that it is for our own honour. By following the Lord fully, we shall finally triumph over the calumnies of the wicked. Herod feared John, when he cast him into prison, and “because he knew he was a just and holy man.”

2. It is necessary to secure inward peace. “Light is sown for the righteous; great peace have they that love thy law, even the peace of God.”

Brethren, we shall never properly taste the comforts of religion till we “follow the Lord fully.” To have a heart, and no heart in the ways of God, will always be attended with uncomfortable sensations. “To follow the Lord fully” will sweeten every earthly comfort.

3. Our Lord hath in some respects entrusted us with his glory. The more fully we follow the Lord, the more glory will redound to him. The eyes of the world are on us; therefore, for the honour of our Master, we ought “to follow him fully.”

4. The love of our neighbour is another motive. What mischief do hypocrites do to the ways of God!

5. And, lastly, those "who follow the Lord fully," shall possess the good land of promise, of which Canaan was only a type. "To whom the by patient continuance: blessed are they who do his commands."

They there shall see Isaac and Jacob, Caleb, and Joseph, &c. above all, Jesus the Mediator; and shall not this prospect stimulate us to be followers of those? Do any of the saints around the throne repent that they "followed the Lord fully?" Let us plead "with the Lord for another spirit."

THE WALL AND GLORY OF JERUSALEM.

For I, saith the Lord, &c.—Zech. ii. 5.

IN the former chapter the prophet had two gracious visions, one of a man riding amongst the myrtle-trees, in the bottom, Christ and the despised church at Babylon; the other of four carpenters, sent to fray and cast out the horns which had scattered the church: by both giving assurance that he would disappoint the enemy of his afflicted people.

In this chapter we have another vision of a man with a measuring line in his hand, to show that the Lord was now in readiness to build and restore the city and temple; the former we find accordingly done; Neh. iii. and vi. 15; the latter by Josh. and Zerub. Ezra vi. 14, 15.

They were now called to build the city and temple: two great discouragements they met with, danger and scorn. Neh. iv. 1—8; vi. 1—10. Ezra iv. 4, 5. The Lord here, by a gracious promise, fortifieth them against the fear of both; against the fear of danger, by promising to be their protection, and against the fear of scorn, by promising to be their glory. When they are without walls, he will be their wall; when they are without gates, he will be their gate, his salvation shall be a bulwark to them; they shall call their "walls salvation, and their gates praise." Isa. xxvi. 1; lx. 18.

The words of the text set forth the Lord opposing all the enemies, and removing all the fear of his people, by a double promise of protection against all powerful opposition, and honour against all reproachful insults: "For I, saith the Lord."

A weak people met together about a hated and invidious enterprise, opposed by strong, subtle, active, and malicious enemies, certainly need Divine aid; well, "I, saith the Lord, will be a wall unto them." But potent enemies can batter walls and scale them. Ezek. xxi. 22. Prov. xxi. 22. But the Lord to prevent fear, will be a wall of fire, which the enemy will not dare to approach. But a wall may have breaches, Neh. i. 3, and admit the enemy; Isa. xxii. 9; but every work of the Lord is perfect: "a wall round about." But if the wall be fire, what will become of the houses of the city? I will be a wall unto her, not a wall against her. A beneficial fire to the city, a consuming fire to the enemy that dare to assault her. A fire in the bush to Moses, a fire in brimstone to Sodom. But a wall may shut men and their miseries together, as the wall of a prison. As the Lord is a wall of fire to keep out the enemy, so he is the glory in the midst, to comfort his people.

The Lord is to his people whatever good they want. In widowhood, he is a husband; Isa. liv. 5; in orphanship, a father; Ps. lxxviii. 5; in darkness, a sun; in danger, a shield; Ps. lxxxiv. 11; a refuge in trouble, and a river in drought; Ps. xli. 1—4; a city where there is no wall, a praise where there is no gate, a light where there is no sun; Isa. lx. 18, 19; a God of salvation in whom his servants can triumph, when all other comforts are wanting. Hab. iii. 17, 18. Let us hold fast our God, and we need fear no enemy. Rom. viii. 31. If he justify, who can condemn? if he love, who can separate? Many may be against us to hate, but none can be against us to hurt. Our enemies may say with Pharaoh, "I will pursue." The name of the city is Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there: and if there be any comfort or help against danger, in heaven or in earth, he can command it; if there be none, he can create it. "I will be a wall."

1. A wall of partition, to separate the church from the world, as the land of Canaan was divided by the Mediterranean sea westward, by the inland seas, and the river Jordan eastward; and at each end, north and south, with mountains; so the church of God is separated from the world. "Israel dwelt alone." Num. xxiii. 9. They are chosen out of the world. John xv. 19. They are not to conform to the world. Rom. xii. 2. Nor to walk according to the course of this world. Eph. ii. 2. The world knows them not. 1 John iii. 1. Looks on them as men to be wondered at. Zech. iii. 8.

2. A wall of conjunction, uniting the parts together in one common interest: as the brain is walled by the skull, and the vital parts by the ribs and breast. Though the members of the church are called out from the world, and are separated from it, yet they are to be united with themselves; Ps. cxxii. 3; to be "of one heart and of one soul." Acts iv. 32. Eph. iv. 1—6, 11—16. A kingdom divided within itself cannot stand; therefore, as Christ is not divided, 1 Cor. i. 13, would not have his bones broken, nor his garment parted; so neither should his church.

3. A wall of protection and defence. He is a rock, a tower, a shield, a chamber, a sanctuary; and here a wall to preserve and protect his people. The Lord doth as a wall protect his church.

(1.) In a way of promise: "I, saith the Lord:" his saying it is doing it. His word is operative and efficacious; the promises of the Lord are walls about his people. He upholdeth all things by the word of his power; his servants consider themselves safe under his promise, they trust in his word. Ps. cxix. 81.

(2.) In a way of power, making bare his arm in this cause; and when all seems to fail, nothing but danger appears, he will say, "Stand still." Ex. xiv. 13.

(3.) In a way of providence, 1. By his creatures, with whom he maketh a covenant in behalf of his people. Job v. 23. Hos. ii. 18. Ezek. xxxiv. 25.—2. By enemies, Isa. xvi. 4, as dead thorns are a fence about a garden.—3. By casualties, ordering contingent events to the protection of his people. 2 Sam. v. 24. 2 Kings iii. 22.

(4.) In a way of grace; causing such rays of spiritual majesty to appear in them, as to constrain their adversaries to reverence them; as Herod did John, and Felix Paul.

His protection is like that of a wall. 1. He is near, the wall joins and is near the city. Ps. xlv. 1; lxxxv. 9. Jer. xxiii. 23.—2. An adequate defence; a wall defends on every side; as the enemies compass, Ps. xxii. 12—16; so doth the Lord compass with mercy. Ps. xxii. 10.—3. An impregnable defence; “a wall of fire,” which cannot be scaled or broken. He once defended his church with a wall of water, Ex. xiv. 22, and still defends it as a wall of fire. By himself, who is a consuming fire; by his angels, who are a flaming fire. Ps. xxxiv. 7.—4. A perpetual defence. Isa. iv. 5.

We have taken a view of the wall; consider the city walled, the subject of his defence; I will be unto her, unto Jerusalem, the city of the great God. Where his dwelling is, there is defence; the more a people have of God’s presence, the more of his protection. When we go to appear before the Lord, the enemy shall not desire our land; Ex. xxxiv. 24; but if we have our back on Jerusalem, we are out of his protection. Luké x. 30.

The church is his property, his rest, Ps. cxxxii. 14, his peculiar treasure. Mal. iii. 16. His eyes and his heart are on them, 1 Kings ix. 3, graven on the palms of his hands. Isa. xlix. 16. Zech. ii. 8. Matt. xvi. 18, “I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst.” The church in the wilderness marched in a four-square body, with a tabernacle of the congregation in the midst of them, and their standards on every side; Num. ii. the standards were the wall, and the tabernacle the glory in the midst. All is well about the church, all is well within: the Lord is the glory in the midst of his people.

1. By his spiritual residence and gracious presence with them. Moses prays, Ex. xxxiii. 18; and the Lord answers, “I will make my goodness:” when he proclaims his goodness he shows his glory. Ps. l. 2; lxxxvii. 3. Rom. ix. 4. The church is the throne, the world but his footstool. Jer. xvii. 12.

2. By his holy ordinances. 1 Tim. i. 11. Eph. iii. 8. Col. i. 27. Therein all divine excellences are most resplendent. Ps. cxxii. 2, &c. There divine wisdom is conspicuous. Eph. iii. 10. Free and glorious grace. Eph. i. 6. Rom. v. 20, 21. His power. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. Eph. i. 19, 20. His holiness, transforming us, &c. 2 Cor. iii. 18. His eternal blessedness. Col. i. 27; iii. 3, 4.

3. In glorious privileges and immunities belonging to every citizen of Jerusalem. Liberty from the tyranny of sin, communion in the affection and prayers of all saints, 1 John i. 7; boldness of access to a throne of grace, Eph. iii. 12; Heb. iv. 16; victory over our enemies and temptations, Rom. v. 3. Acts v. 41. As the cloud in the temple is called the glory of God, 1 Kings viii. 10, 11, so the Lord is the glory of his people when filled with the clouds of affliction. The lily is as beautiful in the midst of the thorns, as in a bed of spices. The Lord is the defence and glory of his people. To conclude:

1. What folly, as well as wickedness, to oppose the church of God, briars to contend with flames! Zech. xii. 6. Isa. xxvii. 4; xlv. 9.

2. We need not make use of carnal wisdom and sinful means for protection. Ps. lxii. 10, 11. 1 Sam. xxvi. 8, 11.

3. Envy not the glory of the world, these are but dross and dung. Abraham gave portions to his other children, but the inheritance to Isaac. Gen. xxv. 5.

4. Above all things, hold fast God and his presence. God will be with you while you are with him.

5. If God be thus your glory, let your glorying be in him alone. Jer. ix. 23, 24. Isa. xlv. 25.

THE CHRISTIAN RACE.

So run that ye may obtain.—1 Cor. ix. 24.

IN these words the Christian life is compared to a race, and the disciples of Jesus on their way to heaven, to racers, till they obtain the glorious prize for which they contend.

I. Give a general account of the race we have to run.

1. In general, the race we have to run comprehends the whole of that duty we owe to God ; namely, obedience, doing what he commands, and patiently suffering what he appoints. The charge given is, “ occupy till I come.” Luke xix. 13. All the gifts of nature, &c. are talents ; if not improved, we shall be condemned. The law of God is extensive. But,

2. The Christian life includes something more than the mere performance of duty ; the cross is in our way, it must be taken up. This may appear an encumbrance, and the Christian sometimes thinks so ; but the cross is far from being an hinderance. “ Tribulation worketh patience,” &c. Rom. v. 3, 4. Thus, in general, the race is cheerfully to do, and patiently to suffer, the will of God.

II. Illustrate the fitness and propriety of the similitude, and show that the Christian life doth much resemble a race.

1. In running a race he must strictly observe the course, he is not at liberty to choose his ground ; he will not obtain a title to the prize. Here the resemblance is exact. There is a certain limited way, emphatically called “ the way of God’s commandments ; must not turn to the right.” Mere activity will not do ; “ who hath required ? ” nothing is left to our humour : “ the law of the Lord is perfect.” Ps. xix. 7.

2. As running a race is swift and constant progression, so ought the life of a Christian. “ Whatever our hand findeth to do ; not slothful in business ; not as though I had already attained ; the path of the just.”

3. There is no gaining the prize, unless we hold out to the end : it signifies nothing to start briskly, and run fast for a season ; the whole ground must be run over, or the person is not supposed to have run at all. So in the Christian race, the temporary profession will avail little : “ He that overcometh : be thou faithful unto death.” Rev. ii. 10.

Thus, in these particulars, the Christian life may, with great propriety be compared to a race. But, though the resemblance be thus strong to justify the comparison, there are several respects in which they differ.

1. In other races, though many may start and hold out to the end, only the foremost obtains the prize. Context ; whereas, it is quite oth-

erwise in the Christian race ; every one that endureth to the end shall be saved.

2. They who run in the Christian race have no jealousy nor envy among themselves ; far less do they molest or hinder one another : the stronger helps forward the weak.

3. In other races, the fall of one candidate gives joy to the rest ; but they who run for the heavenly prize would carry the world with them : "I was glad when they said," &c. Ps. cxxii. 1.

4. They who run in other races have nothing but toil and labour till they obtain the prize ; but, in the Christian race, the exercise itself carries part of the reward : "In keeping thy commandments." Rev. xxii. 14. Sometimes, indeed, they have dark nights and foul weather ; but this is not their constant fare : they have their seasons of joy.

5. The distinguishing property of the Christian race, a certainty of gaining the prize. He does not run at uncertainties.

III. "So run that you may obtain : " and for this end let us consider,

1. That many eyes are upon us ; we are surrounded with spectators, who observe every part of our behaviour.

(1.) The angels, who are ministering spirits, who rejoice at the conversion of a sinner.

(2.) The malignant powers of darkness.

(3.) Above all, the great omniscient God. He compasseth our path ; ought we not then to quit ourselves like men ?

2. Consider that many who run this race are in possession of the prize. "Be ye followers of them ;" "we are compassed about ;" Heb. xii. 1, 2 ; "men subject to like passions." The patriarchs, &c. &c. many of our companions.

3. Who are our fellow-travellers ? the saints. We are not only going to a blessed society, but we are in good company.

4. The goodness of the road : it is not an unbeaten path.

5. We have a kind, sympathizing, and unerring guide. He is given for a leader ; and, "like a father pitieth," &c. "He will bring the blind by a way that they knew not, and lead them in paths that they have not known."

6. The worth of the prize to be obtained ; no other than heaven ; "eternal life ; exceeding, eternal glory : wherefore gird up the loins of your minds ; let us lay aside every weight ; for to him who by patient continuance," &c. Rom. ii. 7.

BELIEVERS CONSIDERED

AS STRANGERS AND SOJOURNERS.

For I am a stranger with thee, &c.—Ps. xxxix. 12.

HAD these words been spoken by one of the Rechabites, who were commanded by their father Jonadab, "That they should drink no wine, neither build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any ; but that they should dwell in tents all their days ;" we might, perhaps,

have considered them as pointing merely at the peculiarities of that sequestered tribe, by which they were distinguished from the rest of mankind; but, as they are the words of David, who was himself a king, one of the lords of this earth, who had every inducement to magnify his office, they lie under no suspicion of partiality, and, therefore, challenge the greatest regard.

And though David wrote these words under the pressure of affliction, yet we find him using the same language in the height of his prosperity. 1 Chron. xxix. 15. In his most prosperous condition he did not look on this earth as his home, but extended his views.

On reading the above passage, the following inquiries may be interesting and profitable:

I. Whence is it that good men consider themselves as strangers and sojourners on earth?

To account for this, one might declaim at a great length on the unsatisfying nature and precarious duration of every thing below the sun. I might remind you, that we came but lately into this world, so we must shortly go out of it; and might descend to various calamities that embitter human life, from which none are exempt; the particular sufferings of the righteous, &c. But let us not suppose that the people of God consider themselves as strangers, &c. solely, or even principally, for such reasons as these. They renounce the world, not because it is unfriendly to them, but because it is unsuitable; they would despise its smiles no less than its frowns, and leave it to those who have no other portion. Here David not only styles himself a stranger, but a sojourner.

1. Every man is a stranger who is not a native of the place where he resides; but a sojourner is one who maketh only a passing visit to the place, with a resolution to leave it again, and proceed on his journey. This last is a distinguishing character of the saints. Wicked men know they must leave this earth, no prospect of going to a better; whereas, the godly, who are "citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem," can look forward to the time of their departure. "Knowing that when the earthly house." 2 Cor. v. 1, 2. They would not live always. They are strangers in affection as well as condition; their hearts are elsewhere.

2. The saints justly count themselves strangers, because they are regenerated; born from above; distant from their native country. Every thing tends to the place of its original; grace, that comes down from heaven, leads the soul upward. Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; the world cannot satisfy the heaven-born spirit. Looks forward to its inheritance, kindred, "God the Judge of all, Jesus the Mediator," Heb. xii. 23, its everlasting abode. Here they sojourn but awhile, till they be rendered "meet to enter on the purchased possession." In these respects the children of God consider themselves as strangers, &c. Their sentiments, in this matter, are not the effects of disappointment or vexation, but the conclusions of an enlightened mind; they are willing to leave this world, because they have a home to go to.

II. What manner of behaviour is most expressive of this temper, and best suited to the condition of *strangers*? This part of our subject opens a field of practical instruction.

1. If we look on this earth as a strange country, through which we are only passing to our native home, it certainly ought to be our care, that we receive as little hurt as possible in our passage. There is a maxim of common prudence: the greatest hurt the world can do us, is to make us forget the place of our destination, and loiter in the way. Its smiles more to be dreaded than its frowns. "The prosperity of fools." Prov. i. 32. It is difficult to possess much, and not overlove it. "If riches increase;" Ps. lxii. 10; when all things are agreeable, we find ourselves disposed to say, "Soul, take thine ease." We ought not to despise the bounties of Providence, "nor to trust in uncertain riches. Rejoice as though we rejoiced not; buy as though we possessed not." 1 Cor. vii. 30.

2. It is not enough we receive no hurt; be careful to make all the provision we can for our better country. The scriptures speak of a meetness. "Providing bags that wax not old. Let us grow in grace." Get as much as possible of heaven while here: "Every one that hath this hope." 1 John iii. 3. "I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims. Let us add to our faith: so an entrance shall be administered." 2 Pet. i. 11.

3. It becomes strangers to endure with patience and fortitude any hardships; we ought to lay our account with inconveniences. Our Master "was a man of sorrows;" he hath told us, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." The prospect of what is before us; primitive Christians took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; and, 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

4. If we view heaven as our everlasting abode, we ought to be solicitous to be thoroughly acquainted with the way. Ps. cxix. 19, 54. He knew the word was a light; the scriptures mark out the way. Ps. xix. 7—11.

5. If we consider ourselves as strangers, we ought to behave like those who belong to a better country. They who love their country will be jealous of its credit: "Walk circumspectly. Walk worthy of the Lord." Col. i. 10.

6. If we have turned our back on the world, let us help one another on in our way, and take as many as possible with us; do all we can to strengthen the weak, advise the doubtful, animate the discouraged. Above all, beware of falling out with our fellow-travellers: are any walking in an opposite road, remember, we are brethren. Should we meet with one of our countrymen in a foreign land, in an abject condition, and knew that he was heir to a plentiful estate at home, would we not endeavour to convince him of his folly, and persuade him to return? and shall we not be concerned for immortal creatures, perishing with hunger, when there is bread enough in our Father's house, and to spare? Let us imitate the good Shepherd, who came to seek and to save. Luke xix. 10.

CHRISTIAN CANDOUR.

And he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.

Gen. xlv. 24.

Thus is the advice which Joseph gave to his brethren when he sent them away from Egypt, with Pharaoh's orders to bring back their father

Jacob and all his family. Joseph had long ago observed his brethren to be of a peevish, quarrelsome disposition; and the late very moving transaction of his making himself known unto them, he justly imagined would call to their minds what they had formerly done against him, and very probably be the occasion of reviving their mutual contentions: and that which confirmed him in this suspicion was, his overhearing his eldest brother upbraiding the rest on this head, saying, “*Spoke I not unto you?*” &c. Though, at that time, they knew not that he understood them, because he conferred with them by an interpreter.

Upon so well-grounded a suspicion, then, no advice appeared to him more seasonable or necessary to be given them at parting, than this caution, “*See that ye fall not out by the way.*” Joseph still loved his brethren and had forgiven them all; and therefore lays them all under the same obligation, to love and forgive one another. The same charge our Lord Jesus Christ hath given to all his disciples, that they “*love one another;*” that “*they live in peace,*” and that “*they forgive, as they hope to be forgiven.*” Luke vi. 37.

In discoursing on these words, we shall consider them as a general proposition, containing a very important exhortation, equally incumbent upon us; still keeping the history with which they are connected in view, as proper to furnish us with some useful, occasional remarks. And,

I. We may notice the true nature and extent of the caution suggested in the text. And this may be comprehended under the following propositions:

1. This exhortation, to avoid all uncharitable contentions, does not oblige us to be all of the same sentiments; or, in the strict sense of the phrase, to think the same thing.

This, in the very nature of things, is simply impossible. Whilst men are of a different make and complexion of mind, they must see things in a different light, and consequently have different opinions of them. And to compel men by acts of violence to be of the same opinion, is infinitely absurd. To torment the body in order to enlighten their minds, is just as reasonable as to pretend to cure a wound by an argument; and they who are for informing men’s judgments by breaking their bones, may as well attempt to set them again by a lecture on logic.

No; as men are accountable for their own souls, they must and ought to think and judge for themselves; and not suffer their consciences to be domineered over, or their understanding dictated to, or their faith directed by any man, or any set of men on the face of the earth: “*For one is their Master, who is in heaven.*” Eph. vi. 9.

2. As a difference of opinion, so a diversity of temper, should not prevent our compliance with the exhortation in the text.

In order to live in peace, very large and charitable allowances must be made for every one’s natural temper; which, though it be not so much out of his power as his judgment, yet, as it is natural and born with him, it is one of the most difficult things in the world sometimes to correct its faults; and though reason directs, and religion obliges us to this, yet how often does nature rebel against reason, evade religion, and break through the restraints of both? Whatever abatements are

due on this score, yet certain it is, that as persons may be of different judgments, so they may be of different tempers, and yet be united in the bonds of Christian love.

3. We are not hereby required to be totally blind and insensible to the mistakes and failings of good men. There is no real character on earth so perfect as to have nothing wrong in it. In the best of men we see something amiss; and in some good characters a great deal that is so. And we cannot help being displeased therewith; and the more, in proportion as we ourselves are affected thereby. With all their faults, we may, and ought, to love them for their virtues; at least, the latter should prevent our falling out with them on account of the former.

4. If on account of the forementioned difference of judgment, temper, and conduct, there arises any accidental discord, or breach of charity, this precept requires a speedy and hearty reconciliation. Irreconcilable resentment is not allowed to Christians.

Lastly. The whole extent of the duty recommended in the text, may be comprehended under the great Christian duty of love, so often inculcated and repeated in the New Testament.

This is the very genius and spirit of the gospel, without which there can be nothing of the true Christian disposition. Of this the apostle Paul gives us a most beautiful and animated description, 1 Cor. xiii. under the name of charity.

II. We may suggest some proper motives to induce us to comply with the exhortation in the text, as it hath been now explained.

The relation and circumstances which Joseph's brethren were in, when he gave them this advice, and which were so many inducements to them to comply with it, are in a good degree, common to us, and so far are equally proper to engage us to the same. For,

1. We are brethren. Like the patriarchs, "we have all one Father." We should therefore "love as brethren." Among brethren there is oftentimes a great dissimilitude of condition and circumstances. Some are weaker, and some stronger; some have better capacities than others; some better tempers; others more knowledge. But that which does or should unite them all in affection is, that "they have all one Father." Eph. iv. 6.

As we are all of us the children of "our Father which is in heaven," and are taught to acknowledge and address him as such, this filial relation wherein we stand to God, should remind us of the fraternal relation wherein we stand to one another, and the mutual love it requires. "Love as brethren, be kindly affectioned with brotherly love: let brotherly love continue." Let us but think with what an eye of pity and displeasure our common Father in heaven looks down upon the little weak contentions of his peevish, froward children here on earth.

2. It was another considerable motive to the patriarchs to comply with this advice, that it was given them by their own dear exalted brother; who had not only the tenderest regard to their interest by the ties of nature, but was able to support it by the power and dignity of his station. We have the same motive to influence us. For this exhortation, to love one another, is given us by Jesus Christ himself, who is not ashamed to call us brethren, and who was, in all things, made like unto

his brethren. And as our brother, who loves us all, he hath given us this seasonable advice, that "we love one another." John xv. 12.

3. Another reason why Joseph's brethren should not fall out with one another was, because they were all guilty; all guilty, not only in their behaviour towards Joseph, but in all probability in their behaviour towards one another. And is not this our own case? However, most certain it is, we are all of us no less guilty in our behaviour towards Christ, than Joseph's brethren were in their behaviour towards him. We stand infinitely more in need of his forgiveness than any of our offending brethren do of ours; and his readiness to forgive us all, should strongly induce us to forgive one another.

Therefore,

4. This duty may be further urged from this consideration, that we all hope to be forgiven of God. And our forgiving others is made one of the express conditions of our receiving forgiveness from him. We pray to be forgiven on no other terms, when we say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." And our Lord explains that petition of his prayer in this sense: "If," says he, "ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." Matt. vi. 14, 15.

And to induce us to this forgiving temper, no consideration can have a greater force than this: that our greatest enemy cannot stand so much in need of our forgiveness as we do of God's. So Joseph's brethren knew, when they came to their father's house, they should be all filled with self-remorse and shame, in unravelling to him the whole mystery of his son's story, and would all want his forgiveness; which consideration would be a strong argument to comply with their brother's advice, "not to fall out by the way." Again,

5. Like them we are all sojourners in a strange land. It hath been observed, that there is nowhere to be found a more sincere and disinterested friendship than among those of the same country in foreign lands, at a distance from their common home. Their being exposed to the same hazards, difficulties, and disasters, and having the same interests, views, and designs, with regard to their journey, is that which knits them together with a more than common tie of affection. Happy, if the same observation could with equal justice be made of all Christians, who, in a religious view, are in the same circumstances, "Pilgrims and strangers on earth." It is something unnatural, then, for them to be alienated in their affections, and to increase the inconveniences of their journey, by their "falling out by the way."

Lastly. Another circumstance that is common to us with Joseph's brethren, and which should equally induce us to comply with the exhortation he gave them is, that we are all travelling to the same home. That whatever different subordinate views we may each of us have here, our main and general view is the same. We are all tending to the same place, the heavenly Jerusalem; and the blessed hope of what we all expect to meet when we arrive safely at home, should effectually prevent us from "falling out by the way."

Heaven is a place that knows nothing of those jarring discords, feuds, and confusions, which infest this earthly world. That is the abode of

peace and joy, and everlasting love. Let us then remember the home toward which we are professedly travelling, and it will be a good expedient to prevent our "falling out by the way."

FAITH TRIUMPHANT IN THE DAY OF CALAMITY.

Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, &c.—Hab. iii. 17, 18.

IN the 16th verse of this chapter the prophet foretells a dreadful war, wherein the Chaldeans should invade Israel; and, in the 17th verse, he exhibits what is the usual, but awful consequence of war and famine. The text exhibits a season of peculiar distress, and the exercise of a gracious heart in the time of calamity.

I. A season of peculiar distress. Verse 17. This is, indeed, a season of peculiar distress! In reference to such times, let me call your attention to the following observations:—

1. Such seasons are effected by the hand of God. He is not a mere spectator, but he is the great Agent in bringing these things to pass. This truth may be proved from many parts of scripture; but let one suffice, which is Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream. Gen. xli. 25—32. This consideration should lead us to say with Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do that which seemeth him good;" and with David, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways." Ps. cxlv. 17.

2. Such seasons are the consequence of man's sin. The earth was a stranger to such visitations, while Adam remained, as God made him, upright. But sin introduced this and every other misery. We find, that wherever the word of God records such seasons of distress, it also records the cause of them. The Jews, after their deliverance from captivity, were visited with famine. Why? because they neglected to rebuild the temple. Hag. i. 3—11. Why did so many sore plagues fall on the Egyptians? because Pharaoh opposed the command of God concerning Israel's release. Read from the 7th to the 12th chapter of Exodus. Why did God threaten, by the prophet Micah, to bring the sword and famine upon Israel? We learn, though God frown awfully, yet men persist in sin dreadfully. Micah vi. 9—15.

3. Such seasons are designed by Infinite Wisdom to answer some important end. God does not do any thing in vain. If he work, it is with a view to accomplish his own wise and holy designs. He visits us in this way,

(1.) To manifest his absolute right over all creatures and things. He claims them all as his own. Ps. l. 11. And he makes it manifest that they are his own, by taking them away at his pleasure; for the justice of the Divine Being would not permit him to take from his creatures that which does not wholly belong to him. Men are too prone to think that the Almighty acts the part of a robber, forgetting that all they enjoy is his. It is only lent to man for a season; God is still the owner, and, of course, has a right to be the disposer; and will, for he hath said, "Shall I not do what I will with mine own?" Matt. xx. 15.

(2.) To convince us of our entire dependence upon him for all our temporal enjoyments. Men are too ready to trust in their own wisdom, strength, diligence, and prudence, and to forget how entirely dependent they are upon God for all these things. But, without the Divine blessing, all they do is ineffectual. They may plough and they may sow, but they cannot cause the earth to bring forth; and when it does bring forth, they cannot secure its fruit from the withering blast, nor from the destructive flood.

(3.) To prove to us that earthly comforts are uncertain and perishing. If the Almighty did not, at times, deal with us in this way, we should seek for more happiness in the creature than it can actually afford. The design of God, in bestowing temporal benefits, is to help us through life, not to make us too much in love with it. The Saviour's precept here is very suitable. Matt. vi. 19.

(4.) To lead us to the exercise of gratitude, when temporal blessings abound. The person who is never sick, knows not how to be thankful for health. And if we were favoured with a constant succession of plentiful seasons, we should forget our obligation to God.

(5.) For the exercise of Christian graces in the hearts of his people. It is said, that "the Lord trieth the righteous:" Ps. xi. 5: and this is one mean by which he tries them. Now is the trial of their faith, patience, and resignation; now he will make it appear, that they are something more than mere worldlings. They who possess his saving grace, find an abundant need of it at such a period, and enjoy perhaps clearer evidences of their state, than they did in seasons of prosperity.

II. The exercise of a gracious heart in times of calamity. "I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Verse 18. Observe,

1. Gracious souls have a source of joy, when those of the ungodly are all dried up. When earthly enjoyments are taken from the ungodly, they have nothing left; their mirth is ceased, for their all is gone; and they say with Micah, "Ye have taken away my gods, and what have I more?" Judges xviii. 24. But in the loss of all, Christians can rejoice in their God. Why? because, as Mr. Henry observes, "when they are full, they enjoy God in all; so, when empty and impoverished, they can enjoy all in God."

2. This rejoicing in God, in the midst of calamity, is the fruit of divine faith. It is because they can say with David, "This God is our God for ever and ever," &c. It is because the promises are believed. Isa. xxxiii. 16; xxxvii. 19. Job v. 20, 22. "In famine he shall redeem thee from death. At destruction and famine thou shalt laugh." If the promises were not believed, the soul would not rejoice. It is only in proportion to the strength of our faith that we shall joy in God at these seasons.

3. It is a view of the gracious character of God, as a Saviour, that causes the sinner to rejoice in him. "I will joy in the God of my salvation." Not only my Saviour from the horrors of famine; but also my Saviour from the horrors of eternal death; not only that God who feeds my body with food convenient for me, but who feeds my soul with living bread, and gives me to drink of the water of life. This is my joy. Isa.

lxi. 10. If our views of God, as our salvation, do not extend to the soul as well as to the body, to eternity as well as time, we have little cause for joy.

Improvement.

1. God can as easily take away the whole of our possessions as part of them. Therefore, do not suppose you have such and such possessions that are secure ; neither rain, nor floods, nor frosts, nor any thing else, can touch them. They are no farther secure than as they are secured by the Lord.

2. You will continue strangers to true happiness, while you remain strangers to the spirit of the prophet. You must possess a good hope that God is your portion, before you can rejoice in seasons of calamity. If you have no source of joy but creature-comforts, consider what a shallow fountain you draw your enjoyments from.

3. In seasons like these, or at any season, beware how you endeavour to add to your own enjoyments, at the expense of any other's comfort. Have you any bowels of compassion for the poor and needy? Not if you possess the means to relieve them at these seasons, and do not; if you exact from them the very highest price for provisions, which you can afford to sell below what is esteemed the market-price. The laws of your country may acquit you, but not the law of heaven. Zech. vii. 10. To enrich yourselves at their expense, is to oppress them; it is so in God's sight. He that considers the case of the poor, and relieves them from a right principle, is pronounced blessed. Ps. xli. 1. You who turn a deaf ear to the voice of the poor, hear the voice of God. "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want." Prov. xxi. 13; xxii. 16.

4. Let the oppressed poor remember to whom vengeance belongeth. Keep in mind what is written, Rom. xii. 17—21.

5. If you can rejoice in God, as the God of your salvation, you shall soon be in the country where neither famine nor scarcity can ever be experienced. "For in the presence of God is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore. Ps. xvi. 11. Let the blessed hope of future joys support you under present troubles. Your wants are but few, and but for a season: your future inheritance will be perfect in its nature, and eternal in its duration.

SIN, A DEBT.

Forgive us our debts.—Matt. vi. 12.

SINCE we are all sinners, all are debtors: that we may keep to this scripture-comparison, let us consider,

I. In what respect sinners are in debt to God.

1. As a servant to his master, when he hath neglected his business and wasted his goods. Matt. xviii. 24. Luke xvi. 1.

2. As a tenant to his landlord, when he is behind in his rent, or has committed waste upon his premises. Matt. xxi. 33, 34. Isa. v. 2. Prov. xxiv. 30, 31.

3. As a borrower to the lender. Ps. cxvi. 12; 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

4. As a covenant breaker, who is bound to perform certain things, but does not make good his agreement. Deut. xxvi. 17. Isa. xxiv. 5, 6.

5. As the debt of a malefactor to the laws and government of this country, when he is found guilty of treason or felony; and this seems the most proper notion of the word here. Gal. iii. 10, 23. Rom. iii. 19.

6. It is like the debt of a surety on account of the principal. I mean the guilt we have contracted by partaking of other men's sins. We have by the influence of our example, by advice or encouragement, by contributing to their temptations, or by consent and approbation, made ourselves partners with others in sin. 1 Tim. v. 22.

II. Sinners are very like bad debtors. For,

1. They are often unconcerned about their debt. Gen. iv. 7. Oh! what multitudes of precious souls are lost for ever through mere carelessness.

2. They are very wasteful, and squander away their substance like the prodigal. Luke xxi. 16. Eccl. ix. 18.

3. They do not love to see their creditor, nor to settle their accounts with him. Job xxi. 14, 15. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

4. Bad debtors are frequently timorous; and when threatened, their hearts fail them, and they are ready to fear that every man they meet is a bailiff. Gen. iv. 13, 14.

5. They are often dilatory and deceitful; and, though they promise fairly, always find some evasion to put off present payment. Matt. xviii. 29.

6. Sinners often deny and extenuate their debts. Mal. iii. 8—13.

7. They are in a dangerous situation; for though some persons who owe a great deal, may, from several considerations, be quite easy; they are such considerations as cannot be admitted in the present case, for they are utterly insolvent. Rom. iii. 19.

8. Death will shortly arrest the sinner: the authority of his office is not to be disputed, nor his power resisted. Eccl. viii. 8. Rom. v. 12.

9. A solemn account must be given to the creditor, who is judge himself in this cause. Rom. xiv. 12. Eccl. xi. 9; xii. 14.

10. Hell is the prison to which impenitent debtors will be condemned at last. Matt. xviii. 34.

III. Let us now inquire what is included in this greatest of all mercies, forgiveness of sin as a debt.

1. God stays process for the present, and suffers not the law to take its course; judgment is given against us, but execution is not taken out upon it. Job xxxiii. 19—21, 24.

2. He cancels the bond, vacates the judgment, and disannuls the hand-writing that was against us. Col. ii. 14. Heb. viii. 13. Isa. xxxviii. 17.

But the bond may be cancelled, and the sinner not know it, and so the broken bones may be still complaining: and therefore,

3. God by his Spirit, writes a full acquittance on the believer's conscience, and by it entirely removes all fears of future wrath. Isa. xii. 1. Rom. viii. 16. But may these debtors hope to be continued in the service of so gracious a Master? Yes: for,

4. Whom God forgives he accepts into favour, and advances to the highest honour and happiness. Rom. viii. 17.

IV. But how shall we obtain this forgiveness?

1. We must confess the debt, with a penitent and obedient heart. Prov. xxviii. 13.

2. We must acknowledge ourselves for ever obliged to the Lord Jesus, who hath graciously paid our debt. Matt. xx. 28.

3. Be watchful against contracting fresh debts, and constantly pray for sufficient grace to withstand temptation.

4. Let us also forgive others, if we hope to be forgiven. Matt. vi. 14, 15. This is our unquestionable duty, for while we live in the present world we are liable to many kinds of injuries.

(1.) In our own persons. Acts xii. 2, 4.

(2.) In the offices to which Providence may call us. Num. xii. 2.

(3.) In our friends and relations, either by corrupting or destroying them. Matt. ii. 16.

(4.) In our property and possessions. 1 Kings xxi. 15.

(5.) In our reputation and good name. To all these wrongs we are subject, God permitting the wickedness of men a large scope to vent itself, and affording us a large field to exercise our meekness and forgiving temper. Rom. xii. 19.

But it is in no case unlawful to require reparation from those who have injured us: this is a matter of great importance, and, therefore, let it be well considered.

1.) Some injuries cannot be well passed over without doing wrong to others, such as robbery and other violations of the laws.

2.) Others may be to the ruin of our estates, character, or even to the endangering of life. There is certainly no precept in the scriptures, which, in these cases, forbids our seeking reparation in a legal way; yet, let it be still remembered, we must never be both judge and executioner in our own cause. If ever it happen that we must determine a matter by a law-suit, let it be: 1. Something of great importance; 2. when we have stubborn persons to deal with, who will not abide by the arbitration of judicious Christians; and 3. when we have tried all proper means to obtain justice from them without effect. But let us still maintain love to the persons with whom we have the controversy, and be ready to do them any kindness in our power. To incline us constantly to practise this great gospel-duty, let us consider,

1. That it is infinitely more honourable to forgive a wrong than to revenge it. Ex. xxxiv. 6.

2. How many offences hath God forgiven us. Isa. lv. 7.

3. Remember the binding particle in the text, "as we forgive our debtors."

THE PERFECTION AND EFFICACY OF GOD'S LAW.

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.—Ps. xix. 7.

THE term law is very equivocal in scripture; here it seems to signify the whole word of God, especially the doctrines of the gospel. Ps. i. 2.

Rom. viii. 2. And it is so called because every thing necessary to the right constituting of a law is found in it. As,

1. Equity, without which it would be the rule of an arbitrary tyrant, who rather oppresses than directs his subjects.

2. It is published for the instruction of all, and is not intended as a private snare to deceive any.

3. Its Author is the Lord of the universe. Isa. xxxiii. 22. James iv. 12. Lastly, the end of this law is the greatest public good: the consequence of our obedience to it is eternal salvation.

I. This law is said to be perfect,

1. Because of its own inherent excellency: it is not like other good laws, which must (like their authors) necessarily have their defects.

2. Because it directs us to that holiness and sincerity which is the perfection required of us.

3. Because the power of it brings every thought of the heart into obedience, and extends the absolute dominion of its Author over the whole soul. Isa. xxvi. 13.

4. It is sufficient for all the purposes for which it was given, and needs no human additions. And,

5. It is unalterable in its nature, and can never be abolished.

II. This law converteth the soul; for,

1. It hath an awakening influence upon the souls of sleeping sinners. Eph. v. 13, 14.

2. It enlightens the minds of men to discern sin and its consequences. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

3. It hath a convincing efficacy.

4. It wounds and penetrates the soul with unknown anguish. Acts ii. 37.

5. It has an influence in renewing all the faculties of the soul, and drawing them all to the love and practice of holiness. 1 Pet. i. 23. 1 Thess. i. 9.

The power of this law appears to be very great, when attended with a divine influence.

1. From the various subjects upon whom it works. Acts xxiv. 16. Mark vi. 20. 1 Sam. xv. 24. 1 Tim. i. 13. Acts xix. 26. 1 Cor. vi. 10, 11.

2. In the manner of its operation, which often strikes suddenly, and in an instant alarms the sinner. Acts ii. 37. 1 Thess. i. 5. Rom. i. 16.

3. In the surprising alterations it produces not only in the lives, but in the tempers and dispositions of men. Gal. i. 23. Phil. iii. 7, 8, 9.

Inferences.

1. This word is of divine authority. 1 Thess. ii. 13.

2. The preaching of this word is an invaluable mercy. Acts xiii. 26.

3. What an awful judgment it is to the hearers of the gospel when they receive this grace of God in vain! Heb. vi. 7, 8. 2 Cor. ii. 16.

Consider, sinners, 1. whose word this is you so slight and despise. Ps. i. 17.

2. While you remain stupid and indifferent, it comes with power to many that are around you.

3. Let all who have felt convictions be careful not to stifle them; let them not be like such as are described in Hosea vi. 4.

4. However deep our convictions are, we have reason to bless God for them: it is better to weep, tremble, and be distressed now, than to mourn without hope for ever.

5. If ever you have seen sin in the glass of this law, let it be abhorred by you in all its various forms. Then you will for ever rejoice and gladly obey the gracious command of your compassionate Redeemer: "Go and sin no more."

THE WRATH OF MAN MADE TO RE- DOUND TO GOD'S PRAISE.

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, &c.—Ps. lxxvi. 10.

THIS Psalm appears to have been composed on the occasion of some remarkable deliverance obtained by the Jewish nation. Some suppose that it refers to the defeat of Sennacherib's army by the angel, when they came up and besieged Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah; others think that it was written on the occasion of the victory in the days of Jehoshaphat, recorded in 2 Chron. xx. 27. The church improves it: 1. To the honour of Israel's God. Verses 3, 7, 8, 9.—2. To the perpetual disgrace of Israel's enemies. Verses 5, 6.—3. To the consolation of the true Israel of God in all ages, "Surely the wrath of man," &c.

By the wrath of man, we are to understand the undue rage of ungodly men blown into a flame. It is the same word in the second Psalm, "Why do the heathen rage?" &c. Verse 1. So that though the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, it is, nevertheless, forced to minister to his praise. "And the remainder thereof he doth restrain;" i. e. the Lord will allow scope to the wrath of man, so far as it is subservient to his praise; the rest shall be curbed and bound up, when it would attempt to go beyond its prescribed limits. He says to it, as to the waters of the ocean, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." We shall, in our present meditation, attempt to illustrate and confirm this truth, that the wrath of ungodly man is over-ruled for the best purposes, viz. to the praise and glory of God.

I. The wrath of man redounds to the praise of Divine power. It brings it forth with full and awful lustre to the view of mankind. All power is in his hands both in heaven, and in earth; and he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. And this, the enemies of God's church and people are sometimes given to understand, when engaged in the most daring enterprises. 2 Kings xix. Ps. ii. 1—3.

II. The wrath of man is made to praise the wisdom, as well as the power of God. Nothing displays more remarkably the admirable counsel of heaven, than snaring the wicked in the work of their own hands. History abounds with examples of those who were ministers of Providence in accomplishing purposes directly contrary to those they had in view. Thus, the cruelty of the sons of Jacob. Thus, the wrath of Pharaoh against the Israelites, and his unjust attempts to detain them in bondage, proved the occasion of bringing them forth from the land of

slavery. Thus the inhuman plan which Haman had formed for the ruin of Mordecai, and extirpating the whole of the Jewish nation, paved the way for Mordecai's high promotion. Job v. 12, 13.

III. The wrath of man praises the justice of God, by being employed as the instrument of inflicting punishment on sinners. And their actions are so overruled, that the wrath which they meant to pour forth upon others, frequently recoils, by its effects, on themselves. The Lord sometimes delivers them up to themselves, and they become their own tormentors, making their own wickedness to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them : the avenging hand of a righteous God is conspicuous ; and thus the Psalmist's observation is verified. Ps. xxxvii. 14, 15.

The wrath of man also praises the justice of God, in the punishment of others. Ex. ix. 16.

IV. The wrath of man is made to praise the goodness of God. This is the most unexpected of its effects ; but the observation may be illustrated.

1. It is sometimes employed as an instrument of discipline and correction to the people of God. So that their oppressors are in truth no more than the ministers of God to them for good. In this light the disturbers of the earth are often represented. Isa. x. 5—7, 12, 15, 17, 24, 25.

2. The wrath of man contributes to the benefit of the righteous, by rendering it the means of improving and making manifest their graces. As stars shine in the night, so the graces of the righteous shine with greater lustre in the night of persecution. Here Job, Daniel, &c. present themselves to our view : and the wrath of Pharaoh and the Egyptians made up part of Israel's song. "The enemy said," &c. Ex. xv. 9.

3. When it breaks forth in persecuting religion. It praises the Divine goodness, by being overruled for the advancement of truth and the spread of religion. This was exemplified in the case of the apostles.

4. Shall only add one instance more : by accomplishing ends of most extensive benefit to mankind. Never did the wrath of man suppose it had obtained a more complete conquest than in the case of Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ is a spring of everlasting life to the faithful.

"Surely, the wrath of man, &c."—And "the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." Ps. lxxvi. 10.

V. It is in his hand, and he will let it out in weight and measure.

1. Sometimes by diverting them from their design. 2 Kings xix. 7. 1 Sam. xxiii. 27, 28.

2. By putting favourable thoughts of himself and his people into their hearts. "When a man's ways please the Lord." Dan. ii. 46—48 ; v. 29.

3. By disclosing their secrets, and revealing their plots against his people : thus the plots of the king of Assyria were revealed by Elisha to the king of Israel, whereby his design against Israel was baffled, and his wrath restrained.

4. By taking away their courage. "The stouthearted are spoiled, and the men of might do not find their hands." Ps. lxxvi. 5.

5. By confusing and confounding them. Judges vii. 2 Kings iii.

6. By destroying them, as he did Pharaoh. Ex. xv.

7. By converting them ; he changes the heart, and the lion becomes a lamb. Acts ix.

Inferences.

1. This should lead us to religious contemplation of the hand of God in all the dispensations of Providence.

2. The folly of sinners who oppose the church of Christ. Isa. x. 17.

3. To bear injuries, especially in the cause of Christ, with meekness and resignation. "Vengeance is mine." Rom. xii. 19.

4. What an antidote against the slavish fear of man ! Let the Lord be our fear ; and we need not fear what man can do, for surely there is no peradventure. Ps. cxxv. 1, 2.

THE INDISSOLUBLE

CONNEXION BETWEEN FAITH AND SALVATION.

He that believeth shall be saved.—Mark xvi. 16.

IN order to illustrate this subject, consider,

I. What is faith ? In answer, it is a firm persuasion of the truth of the gospel, accompanied with a deep sense of its importance, and a cordial acceptance of its gracious proposals ; and so producing the genuine fruit of love and obedience.

1. The real Christian believes the pure unadulterated gospel ; the substance of which is this, "God is in Christ." 2 Cor. v. 19. The ground on which he believes, is the testimony of God. 1 John v. 10. He yields not a faint, feeble, wavering assent ; but agreeably to the clearness, strength, and energy of evidence. He may be assaulted with doubts, nor does he wish to remove them by unlawful means, ever ready to follow where truth shall lead. His doubts having this effect, serve in the end rather to confirm than weaken his faith.

2. The gospel which he thus believes, he believes to be most important. It rouses his attention, and calls all the powers of his soul to action. Like a man whose house is on fire, and is at his wit's end, till he has found means to extinguish it ; or like one who has a large estate depending, and uses every effort to get his title confirmed.

3. This belief of the gospel is accompanied with a cordial approbation of its gracious proposals. He readily falls in with the scheme of salvation which Divine Wisdom has contrived, and Almighty Power carried into effect. At the altar of propitiation, he is disposed to sacrifice both pride and pleasure ; and at the feet of the adorable Saviour, to "cast down imaginations." 2 Cor. x. 5.

We have heard the gospel ; have we believed it ? Have we received it in the love of it ? Are our hearts and lives influenced by it ?

II. The salvation promised to them that believe.

Here a scene the most delightful and transporting opens to our view.

A scene the contemplation of which fills the Christian with admiration and wonder.

1. It is a salvation from moral evil.

The soul of man is the workmanship of God ; but, alas ! this temple of God is now laid in ruins ; sin has darkened the understanding. It has dethroned reason, brought a load of guilt upon the conscience, created a thousand fears in the breast, and spread universal anarchy through the soul.

Now from all these evils we are saved by our Lord Jesus Christ. He procures for us the free pardon of sin ; sends down his good Spirit into our hearts to renew our nature, illuminate our mind, restore peace to our consciences. What a blessed change !

2. From natural evil.

Many and great are the mercies of an outward kind to which human nature is liable in the present life. Proofs of this fact arise from every quarter. If we look into history, we shall find a great part of it employed in recording the calamities which have befallen nations : war, fire, tempest, earthquakes, pestilence, famines. If we go abroad into the world, our attention will be arrested by scenes of distress. Job xiv. 1.

Now from all these miseries, the sad effects of sin, Jesus Christ came into the world to save us. Not that good men are exempt from the common afflictions of life ; poverty, sickness, and death, they are liable to. But these few curses are converted into blessings. Rom. viii. 28. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

But if we extend our views to heaven, the promise, as it relates to natural evil, shall receive its full accomplishment. Heb. iv. 9. There is no acting hand ; as the stones that composed the Temple were hewn and prepared before they were brought thither, that the noise of the hammer might not be heard, so the painful exercises of the present life having had their full effect, only the voice of joy shall be heard ; and at the resurrection, the body shall be raised “and fashioned like unto Christ.” Phil. iii. 20, 21.

3. From penal evil.

Indeed the above may properly be called penal, as they are the effects of sin ; but I have here in view the punishment of the wicked. The scriptures, in order to awaken the attention of mankind, give us the most alarming description of the punishment prepared for the impenitent. Deut. xxix. 20. Dan. xii. 2. Matt. viii. 12. xxv. 46. Ps. xc. 11. But from all these miseries our great Immanuel saves us. Rom. iii. 25. Gal. iii. 13.

To these miseries are to be opposed the joys of heaven ; but oh ! what tongue can describe ? Ps. xvi. 11. “Eternal weight of glory.” 2 Cor. iv. 17.

III. The connexion between faith and salvation ; it is necessary, in order to our being saved, that we believe.

1. It is the divine appointment. John iii. 16. Mark xvi. 16. It is not a mere arbitrary command, but the result of infinite wisdom and goodness.

2. There is a fitness or suitableness in faith to the end of its appointment, so that the necessity arises out of the nature of things. The

blessing of the gospel cannot be enjoyed without the medium of faith. Sin is atoned for, heaven opened ; but the actual possession of the good thus procured is as necessary as a title to it. How is that good to be possessed without a suitable temper ? How is this to be acquired but by believing ?

SOCIETY AND HAPPINESS OF THE HEAVENLY STATE.

I beheld, and lo ! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and people, and kindreds, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb.—Rev. vii. 9.

LIFE is a journey ; Christians are travellers ; but the world to which we are going is to us unknown. Those who have gone thither have not returned to give us any information about it. The doctrine which Christ has left behind him, however, supplies us with all the information that is necessary to our happiness. Here life and immortality are brought to light. From his doctrine, we learn what heaven is, and what its employments are. In general, we know that heaven is a place of society : when Lazarus died, he was carried to Abraham's bosom ; and from the passage before us, we learn that it is a very large and blessed society.

I. Inquire,—Of whom the society of heaven will consist.

1. Jesus the Mediator. He is the sun that enlightens the world. He who shed his blood for your salvation. He whom your souls adore, and desire to see, and to enjoy. "I go to prepare a place for you: I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John xiv. 3. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." John xvii. 24. We shall "stand before the throne, and before the Lamb."

2. The angels of God shall form a part of this society. They even now hold an uninterrupted intercourse with the church of God on earth; are continually "ascending and descending on the Son of Man;" are sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation; and at length, shall lead us to the throne of God and the Lamb, and we shall dwell among them. Heb. xii. 22.

3. This society will comprehend all good men; "a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues." There are three things which prevent the full society of good men on earth.—1. We are separated by distance of time. We have heard of Abel; of Enoch, who "walked with God;" of Abraham, of Paul, and others eminent for piety: but we have never seen them. Could we but see and converse with these good men, they would teach us to walk with God, too. Well, there we shall see them; there also, Jesus and his disciples!—2. Here we are separated by distance of place. Some good men live in Europe; a few in Africa, some in America, &c.

Well, we shall all meet in glory, and part no more.—3. Good men are separated by difference of sentiment. Here, they are divided into various classes, and distinguished by several peculiarities; and as truth is the bond of union, we necessarily feel most attached to those whose principles and dispositions are most congenial with our own. But there shall be no dissensions. One blaze of light shall illuminate every heart!

II. Inquire,—Wherein will consist the blessedness of this heavenly society?

1. There they shall be all holy. One reason why we do not rejoice more in the society of the godly here, is, that we have so much sin amongst us, while the world around us is lying in wickedness. Very often, like Lot, “our souls are vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked;” and, with the Psalmist, we are ready to say, “Woe unto us, that we sojourn in Mesek, and dwell in the tents of Kedar!” Here a good man feels his pleasure abated by the reflection, that perhaps his nearest relations are farthest off from the kingdom of heaven, and his house is not so with God. But none of these things are found in heaven: there we shall never behold a sinner, nor be grieved with their conduct any more: “There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Rev. xxi. 27.

2. Not only all holy, but they shall be eminently so. When we meet with good men, we rejoice in their society, and feel a oneness of heart with them: but, alas! we soon discover so many defects; in some a little pride, in others a little covetousness, like the spots in the sun, which though they do not obscure its rays, yet become a blemish. But there, every subject shall be as righteous as the Lord, and every disciple as holy as his Master. 1 John iii. 2.

3. There they shall be completely happy, as well as holy. Many of our sorrows in this world arise from sympathy; and religion not only allows, but teaches us “to weep with those that weep; to bear each other’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” We have some happiness in our religious friends; but often have to say, “Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick.” Here, a dear friend is called to lament the loss of an affectionate wife, a faithful husband, an only child, or a tender parent; there, a beloved friend, involved in some worldly difficulties or temptations. These diminish from the happiness of society. But in heaven the tears shall be wiped from all faces; sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and each shall be as happy as his capacity will admit. Rev. vii. 17.

4. Perfect union in our religious sentiments, affections, and worship, will form an essential part of the felicity of heaven. The want of such an agreement diminishes the aggregate of social happiness; and evil passions both produce, and are produced by it. In the exercise of public worship we feel our minds elevated and dignified: our hearts are more enlarged than in private duties: the latter may be more profitable; but the former are more joyful. Here, however, our pleasures, are abated by the limitation of our society; there, the society will be abundantly large, consisting of “a great multitude which no man can number;” and they shall be “all of one heart and of one soul.”

5. This society shall be blessed with permanence and perpetuity. Fellowship with Christian brethren on earth is sweet, and while engaged in acts of social worship, we feel the endearing bands sweetly drawn around us; but soon we are called to part, and parting divides our joy. Our social pleasures are often damped by the necessity of exclusion from the church, by the death of valuable friends. But there shall be no exclusion from that society; no more death; "neither shall the inhabitants say any more, I am sick!" Isa. xxxiii. 24.

Hence we may learn,—1. What must be our qualification for heaven. John iii. 5.—2. To be reconciled to bereaving providences, and to our own death. Such as die in the Lord are gone to this blessed society.—3. Let us endeavour to render our intercourse with Christians on earth more like that above.

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRESENT SUFFERING

NOT TO BE COMPARED TO HIS FUTURE GLORY.

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, &c.—Rom. viii. 18.

THE general truth contained in these words is this: that the future glory which is prepared for, and secured to the people of God, will, on the most minute and exact comparison, far overbalance all the sufferings they can endure here, however great or long.

In attempting the illustration and improvement of this subject, I shall attend to the several particulars mentioned, and consider, The situation of real Christians in the present world. The glory that is prepared for and secured to them in the next; and the contrast betwixt present sufferings and future glory, as warranting the conclusion declared in the text. Let us contemplate,

I. The inconveniences of the present world, as experienced by real Christians.

Of the sincere people of God, the real subjects of his grace, does the apostle here speak. In the preceding verses he describes them as the children and the heirs of God, and having his Spirit witnessing this relation to their consciences. An unspeakable honour and happiness this! Yet, although they were so highly distinguished, trials attended their present condition. The text speaks of "the sufferings of this present time;" an expression that is applicable to different periods of the world.

Primarily, persecutions and troubles for the cause of Christ might be intended. These our apostles endured, and many others with them. They had espoused a cause that was hated and despised; they had ranked themselves under the banner of a crucified Jesus, whose gospel was "a stumbling-block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks." They were engaged in an opposition to the kingdom of Satan, who moved both hell and earth against them. The apostle represents their condition, in what he declares concerning himself. Acts xx. 23. These seem more immediately intended in the text, their sufferings for Christ and his cause. So great were these, such sacrifices did they make, and

such evils did they endure, that he farther said, 1 Cor. xv. 19. But they had a future prospect: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time," &c.

Did this reasoning relate to the persecutions for Christ, the cruel mockings, scourgings, &c.? It will likewise apply to all the bodily sufferings which the believer may endure in the present world. Dire are the diseases to which these frail bodies are liable, and great are the sufferings that many of God's people endure by their visitation.

1. These sufferings befall the people of God because they are sinners. Though they are sanctified, it is only in part; much corruption still remains: though they are the children of God, much untowardness and disobedience are discovered by them: they have their spots; and their remaining imperfections and corruptions are sometimes the causes of all their sufferings.

2. These sufferings give occasion for the exercise of grace. Had it not been for the sufferings of Job, the church of God would have been destitute of an excellent example of patience under afflictions. Still they are instrumental of good. 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

3. These sufferings show the power and compassion of God, as extended to his people. To what is their preservation in the furnace owing? not to any strength inherent in themselves, but to the presence of God with them, the communications of his grace, and the exertion of his power.

4. These sufferings are ordered by God, to wean his people from earth and fit them for heaven. There are close attachments to earthly connexions in the greatest proficient in grace here; and strong are the ties that bind their affections to them. But great sufferings are sometimes the knife in God's hand that cuts the knot. These constrain affectionate relatives to resign the object of their desires: these make the soul itself willing, yea, desirous to be dismissed.

They also endear the heavenly rest. Delightful indeed will be the soul's entrance into the mansions of bliss; but peculiarly so when signal trials and sufferings have immediately preceded it. This is particularly intimated in that description of glorified saints, Rev. vii. 14.

The believer's sufferings are confined to a militant state. They are the sufferings of this present time. They hasten to a period, and shall shortly be ended for ever. Let us then endeavour to draw aside the veil, and contemplate the honour and happiness that await the subjects of grace in the world that is to come.

II. Consider the future designs and purposes of God respecting his own people.

In the present state they are liable to many sufferings, but another portion awaits them: "Glory shall be revealed in them." 1 Pet. v. 1.

Here words will fail, and our utmost conceptions be straitened. "Eye hath not seen," &c. We may contemplate, we may inquire; but we must be directed by the written word of God, with which we are favoured. There are two ideas suggested in this part of the text.

1. Glory is in reserve for the saints. Under this term the whole happiness and attainments of heaven may be included. Glory is the perfection of grace. Consider this glory as it respects the soul. It con-

tains perfect knowledge, consummate holiness, and complete satisfaction. "For now we see through a glass darkly, &c. I shall be satisfied, when I awake in thy likeness." Consider this glory as it respects the body. This shall be made holy, spiritual, incorruptible, fit to be the receptacle of a glorified spirit, and qualified for appearing in the immediate presence of God. Phil. iii. 21. The soul shall be perfectly sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God; and the body shall be conformed to the pattern of the glorified body of Christ. For what purpose will this change be wrought? That the soul may see its God and Redeemer, hold immediate communion with him, eternally rejoice and triumph in his love, and enjoy a plenary satisfaction in contemplating his glories and celebrating his works. There the capacities of the soul will be amply enlarged; there the powers of the body will also be strengthened, that we may know God, search into his excellences, dive into his purposes, and exult in his praise. This is a glory reserved for the saints. 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. It was designed them in the purpose of God; it was procured for them by the mediation, death, and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ; and the Spirit maketh them meet for the possession of it. This glory is now the object of the believer's faith and hope. But,

2. It shall assuredly be revealed in them. Of this the text speaks with confidence. It is a settled truth. It shall be fulfilled. Has the decree passed? It shall surely bring forth. In the present world there is a dawning of this glory in believers. Such is their experience, and the evidence they give in the Spirit's renewing work on their souls, their submission to God and Christ, their satisfaction in him as their God, their Father, and portion, together with the spiritual consolations and joy, that sometimes cheer them in this howling wilderness. These are evidences of their being designed for glory: these joys are the earnest and foretastes of it. Nevertheless, amidst our brightest attainments, and our most exalted pleasures, we must say, with the apostle, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," &c. 1 John iii. 2.

The season for this revelation of glory is at death and at the resurrection. No sooner is the soul dislodged from the body than it enters into glory: "Absent from the body it is present with the Lord." It then joins the kindred spirits in the world of glory, partakes of their happiness, and unites with them in their praises. And although the body moulders to dust, and sees corruption, yet the day of its glorification hastens on. By the power of Christ it shall be delivered from this gloomy state, raised up a glorious body, and never be liable to death, or changed more. "Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." 1 Thess. iv. 14. The revelation of this glory, how truly desirable is it! and what a precious object of hope is it to the real people of God! especially considering that it is a revelation which shall be made in them. Including,

1. Their own personal consciousness of this glory. They shall be the subjects of it, and feel the peculiar joy and pleasure resulting from its discovery. Unspeakable indeed will be the joys and happiness of the soul, when it feels itself in the immediate presence of God, divested of all its imperfections, and satiated with the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. The expression includes,

2. A manifestation of this glory to others. The glory on them will not be concealed. A public manifestation of it is intended; and this is closely connected with the honour and glory of the Redeemer. "He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." 2 Thess. i. 10. Who shall be witnesses of this glory? No doubt the holy angels of God, who are now employed as ministering spirits, to attend the saints on their way to heaven. Fellow-saints shall witness it. They are now connected, many of them in the bonds of nature, as well as of grace; and their mutual knowledge and communion in glory will be no small part of their future happiness.

III. The contrast between present sufferings and future glory, as warranting the conclusion laid down in the text.

The language intimates a persuasion of mind, founded on a diligent survey, and an exact comparison. "For I reckon," or, as the word signifies, "I account, that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." He had studied the matter, he had balanced the account, he had tried it by a certain and an unerring standard; and this was his settled judgment. Various considerations might be hinted in support of this conclusion.

1. Their nature warrants it. There is now indeed a feeling of our sufferings: whereas, this glory is only discovered by faith. On this account, we do not derive that influence from it which otherwise we might. Nevertheless, the sufferings here endured are partial; they particularly affect the body; and they are alleviated by those comforts, which the Spirit of God affords for the support and encouragement of his people. Future glory will influence the whole person, and have no alloy. It contains perfect happiness, both of soul and body. Its possession will set us in the immediate presence of God, settle us in the blissful enjoyment of him, and be our full salvation. Can any thing be compared with this? Or are any sufferings worthy of a thought that lead to, or have any influence to prepare us for glory? The conclusion is evident.

2. From the duration of this glory, contrasted with the seasons of our sufferings. This is particularly mentioned. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 Cor. iv. 17. Eternity is the duration of this glory. This puts an inconceivable glory upon it. It shall never be interrupted, it shall never fade. The greatest pleasures and enjoyments here are transitory and fleeting; but the heavenly inheritance is "incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away." This glory will run parallel with the soul's existence; it will continue for ever. When ten thousand ages are rolled away, the crown is as fresh as if it had never been worn; the spring as full as if it had never been tasted; the treasure as ample as if a dram had never been touched. Eternity! the glory of heaven, and the triumph of all the saints there! One heavenly vision and enjoyment will make abundant amends for all present sufferings: how exceeding will be the saints' felicity to all eternity!

THE CHARACTER AND PRIVILEGE OF

A TRUE CHRISTIAN.

For our rejoicing, &c.—2 Cor. i. 12.

THE apostle, in these words, acquaints the Corinthians what was his comfort, when under sentence of death, verse 9; and in the repeated dangers he had escaped and hoped to be delivered from, while his life was necessary to the church; not that he expected, or desired, always to be delivered, ver. 10, for he longed; and what encouraged him under foreseen danger, and gave him hope of deliverance, afforded him triumph over death? "I have fought the good fight." And thus he rejoiced, when he observes, "I am ready to be offered." 2 Tim. iv. 6—8. Observe,

I. The character and privilege of the true Christian.

The Christian's conversation in this world is not by fleshly wisdom.

1. He pursueth not that which the flesh preferreth as his chief good, nor guides his practice by carnal policy. He will not do evil that good may come out of it. He honours the great, but he will not suffer them to direct his creed, nor govern his conscience. He "conferreth not with flesh and blood," whether he shall perform his duty; nor suffers the flesh to determine what is his duty: the statutes of the Lord are the rule by which he is resolved to act. He considers those to be injurious who judge of him "as if he walked according to the flesh;" with Moses, "he chooseth to suffer," &c. Heb. xi. 25.

2. In simplicity. What he does is in singleness of heart. Eph. vi. 5. He is what he professes; he meaneth what he saith; his designs are honest; his eye is single; he is as Jacob, a plain man; a Nathaniel in whom is no guile; the glory of God is his principal aim, and the word of God his governing rule; "he doth not regard iniquity in his heart." Ps. lxvi. 18.

3. In sincerity. This word is of near alliance with the former: in its derivation signifies a thing that will bear the light of the sun-beams, when examined, and not prove counterfeit, or worthless: it is joined with truth. "Let us keep the feast." 1 Cor. v. 8. The conversation of the real Christian will be approved on the strictest examination. His graces are not counterfeit, but real. He believeth with the heart. He loveth in deed and in truth. He desireth the Lord to search and prove him, and appealeth to God as to the way he takes. "O Lord, thou knowest." Jer. xv. 15, 16. His chief care is to please God. Gal. i. 10.

4. This simplicity and sincerity is godly. He is in his measure conformable to God; what God commands, Matt. v. 48. "Be ye perfect;" effects, "A new heart will I give;" approves, "The upright shall dwell in his presence." Ps. cxl. 13.

5. The scope and tenor of the Christian's life: his conversation is in simplicity, &c. Sincerity, as a line, runs through his life, and commands the scope of it on all occasions.

His business is to keep a good conscience. "Herein do I exercise myself:" this is his grand aim. It is his purpose to be enabled to say, "My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live." Job xxvii. 6.

He endeavours to perform every duty to God and man ; “ to be holy in all manner of conversation ; to walk in all the commandments and ordinances.” As Enoch, “ he walks with God ; he is in the fear of the Lord all the day ;” in the shop, market. He will not offend his weak brother ; in all relations he acts as a man of God.

6. He acts with sincerity under the greatest temptations. In this world he has not his conversation ; bad as the world is, the sincere Christian labours to “ keep himself unspotted from the world.” With Lot he keeps himself pure in a filthy place ; and is vexed with the abominations he cannot reform. He is content to pass through the world as a stranger, who wears a garb, speaks a language, walks by a law, pursues such designs, and seeks a home the world despises. “ He is crucified to the world.” Gal. vi. 14.

7. He maintains his sincerity to the last ; “ he is faithful to death ; he holds on his way.” He knows well, all who are saved must endure to the end. He is therefore resolved, in the strength of Christ, to finish well, and “ die in the Lord.” He so runs that he may obtain. His earnest prayer is to “ be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.” He is not without fear till he hath “ worked out his salvation.” He thinks it not enough to be preserved from apostacy ; but he addeth “ grace to grace, so that an abundant entrance,” &c. 2 Pet. i. 11.

II. This conversation is by the grace of God.

1. As this grace acteth in him. It is grace that quickens, renews, and disposeth, 2 Thess. i. 11, 12, and strength in the hour of temptation. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

2. As it acteth for him. This grace chains the temper, moderates and shortens our trials, suits our conditions, and provideth for us needful help.

3. As manifested to him. God is pleased to shed abroad his love in his heart ; this sweetens his bitter cups. The consolations of Christ abound : affords cheering prospects, strengthens faith, and cheers hope. “ Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” Foretastes of future happiness encourage the Christian : “ His loving-kindness is better than life.” Ps. lxxiii. 3.

4. The way by which this is manifested : testimony of conscience. If our “ hearts condemn us not,” our consciences witness to the reality of our faith and obedience. 1 John iii. 20.

5. The just testimony of conscience is our rejoicing. There is no inconsistency between our rejoicing in Christ, and rejoicing in the sincerity of our graces. We cannot rejoice in the one, but we must rejoice in the other. This is a source of joy in the time of trial, and the approach of death : “ The Lord will give grace and glory.” Happiness is promised to the sincerity of our grace. Eph. vi. 24. 1 Pet. i. 13.

THE IMPORTANCE OF

KNOWING WHAT SPIRIT WE ARE OF.

But he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.—Luke ix. 55.

THE disciples, when they made the motion for which their Master re-proved them in these words, seem to have been ignorant of the true frame and temper of their own spirits, in which there was too much of revenge and resentment; or, at least, a defect of charity: though they thought they were inflamed with love to their Lord, and a laudable zeal for his honour. This, He, who saw what was in man, might justly blame in them; it being owing to the want of a more careful attention to their own spirits upon this occasion. Hence,

It is observed to be a very faulty thing in any, especially in those who profess to be the disciples of Christ, not to know what spirit, or temper, they are of. Upon this argument our author proposes to consider,

I. The matter to be known is a little more particularly to be inquired into.

And we are concerned to know,

1. What spirit or temper we are of predominantly by nature.

There is a vast difference found among men, a difference founded in the natural constitution; to be seen in childhood, before the mind is moulded by instruction, example, or a course of practice; and hardly ever extinguished in riper years. Either a sour and rugged disposition, or an easiness and gentleness of spirit, an inclination to humanity and tenderness, or the like engaging turn of mind. It would, therefore, be the wisdom of every man to study his own temper. For, according to the tendency of our constitution, we may discover what temptations, in the ordinary course of life, need most to be provided against, and how to improve the advantages of a happier constitution to our greater serviceableness in life.

2. What particular principles and ends govern us in the particular motion of our spirits and actions of life. Whether our principles be good or bad, and whether the ends we propose to ourselves be right.

The morality of our actions, in the sight of God, principally depends upon this. We ought, therefore, to be well assured, that the several deliberate steps we take be agreeable to the dictates of a good spirit; and that which is indisputably good in itself, be done upon right principles and for right ends.

3. What is the prevailing disposition of our souls, whether the Christian temper, or that which is opposite to it.

Whether a holy or heavenly temper, or a sinful and earthly mind, has the ascendancy; for if our disposition be prevailingly sinful or earthly, it is, at best, but still depraved nature. And the worst natural temper, if rectified by grace, is in the way of cure; and that cure will gradually advance, till it arrive at the perfection of the spirits of the just: and since our character takes its colour according to the resolution

of this question, we are concerned most seriously to enter into the proof our own selves, by carefully searching the word of God, and by considering the descriptions of a good spirit given there, either in its general nature, or particular branches, that we may behold our true face in the glass of the gospel.

II. The usefulness and necessity of knowing what spirit, or temper, we are of.

1. As we are reasonable creatures, it is our nearest and most immediate concern.

The most careful inquiries about other things are, in comparison of this, nothing to our purpose; and without the knowledge of our spirits, which is the principal part of ourselves, the power of reflection will appear to have been given us in vain.

2. As we are professed Christians, nothing deserves to have so much laid upon it.

It is the genius of the religion of Jesus to make his disciples of an excellent spirit; and our great Master began his public ministrations with pronouncing blessedness principally to a new and holy temper of soul.

3. As we aim at the favour of God, it is principally to be regarded by us, because it is principally regarded by him.

Men can judge only by outward appearance, but God sees deeper; and therefore the fairest outside, without a right temper of soul, cannot possibly meet with divine acceptance.

4. As we are obliged to a holy life, it is necessary there should be a care of the inward temper, which is the principle of it.

As the heart is, so the life is likely to be. Like a tree, it brings forth fruit after its quality. If a good tree, the fruits will be good: and if a corrupt tree, its fruit corrupt; and the tree is known by its fruit.

5. As ever we would secure inward peace and tranquillity of mind, we should carefully attend to the temper of our souls.

Passion and appetite, where they are predominant, are springs of uneasiness and disquietude; and such distempered spirits as are under their government, cannot possibly be at rest. Nor can we enjoy that sweet peace, which results from reflection and approbation, unless we are governed in our actions by good motives; nor entertain a safe hope of eternity, without being able to discern a fitness of temper to the happiness in reversion.

6. As we are in an ensnaring world, we are concerned to know the bent of our minds.

This will enable us to see where our principal and most constant guard is necessary; what irregular inclinations we should set ourselves most to mortify; and where Satan is not likely to gain an advantage over us. And, indeed, the general knowledge of the imperfection of our own hearts, as well as our particular weakness, is necessary to prevent our confidence in ourselves, and to fix our dependence upon divine grace to keep us from falling.

7. As we should tend upon God's ordinances, and perform religious exercises with advantage, this is needful.

For want of this knowledge of themselves, ill men escape conviction,

and lose the benefit of the aptest means for their everlasting welfare ; and Christ is not entertained, because they see not their need of him. And sometimes good men deny themselves the comfort offered them, for want of a fuller acquaintance at home. Hence presumption is encouraged on the one hand, and unreasonable despondencies on the other are increased, through a wrong application of the word of God.

To conclude ; let us,

1. Not be afraid to know the disease of our own hearts, and the very worst of our case.

2. Often to view ourselves in the glass of the gospel, where a good and a bad spirit, or temper, are plainly distinguished. And,

3. To accompany all our rational inquiries with earnest prayer to God,

That he would search and try us, and enable us, by the grace of his Holy Spirit, to discern the true state of our own case.

DOING TO OTHERS AS WE WOULD BE DONE UNTO.

Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them ; for this is the law and the prophets.—Matt. vii. 12.

OUR blessed Master has given us two short summaries of our duty to our neighbour. One is, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;” and the other is contained in the present text. Both of them are near akin, and yet, in some respects, different. In the former, we are directly referred to our self-love itself, as the measure of our love to others, on the score of the relation, wherein, on many accounts, we are to consider them as standing to us. In this summary, the expectations we have from others, in reference to ourselves, are offered as the measure of our acting towards them. The former is most properly a rule of charity : but this of righteousness and equity.

1. The measure proposed is, not what other people actually do to us ; but what we would they should do to us.

This is a distinction of great importance ; and merits our attention the more, because we are too prone to disregard it. We are ready to say “that such a man refused to do me a kind office, when it was in his power, and why should I serve him when it is in mine ? He treated me with rigour and severity, when he had opportunity for it ; and why should I not make him a return in the same kind ?” But this is the language of a heated and not of a Christian spirit ; of passion, and not of reason or grace. For, most assuredly, I cannot be justified by that which another does, in doing what I condemn in him : that which was faulty in him, must be faulty in me, too.

2. What we actually would that others should do to us, is not, in all cases, a rule of our duty to them ; but the lawfulness is to be presupposed.

It will not follow that I ought to do, or to forbear, a thing to my neigh-

bour, or that I may do so, merely because I am content, or even desirous, that he should do or forbear the like to me. That inclination or desire of mine must first be known to agree with the law of God. A notorious drunkard may be willing to be intoxicated, and made a beast by another ; but it is not, therefore, one jot the more lawful for him to do the like to another in his turn.

3. When we and others are in different circumstances, we are not obliged, by this measure of action, to do exactly the same things to them, as we desire, or expect from them ; but the same things in our circumstances, as we should expect from them, if they were in our condition, and we in theirs.

God, in the course of nature and providence, places men in different relations one to another, in various stations and conditions, and has affixed duties peculiar to each of these. Now the intention of this maxim cannot be to confound all relations, and the duties belonging to them ; as if, for instance, all that a father may expect from a child, or a master from a servant, or a prince from his subjects, was therefore to be done by such superiors to their inferiors. But the plain meaning is, that a father, a master, a prince, should consider what he should reasonably desire and expect from one in the correspondent relation, if he were a child, a servant, or a subject, and then act accordingly.

4. We are not obliged to do all that to others, which we might probably be glad they would do to us, if we were in their case : but all that we could expect from them, as matter of right and duty.

It is hardly to be doubted, but any poor man would be glad that a rich person would not only supply his extreme necessity, but give him a good part of his estate, so as to make his circumstances easy and plentiful ; and it is very likely that, if we were poor, we might be of this mind. But those who are in prosperous circumstances are bound to do to another not all that they in his circumstances might be glad of, but all that they would have good reason to expect, upon the foundation of justice, or charity, or friendship, or relation.

We will now show the strong obligations we are under to be of this temper.

1. It is founded in the reason of things, and is one of the plainest dictates and laws of nature. Such a precept as approves itself to the mind of a reasonable creature, as soon as he hears and understands it, so as not to need any laboured proof.

The obligation results from the sameness of nature which our great Creator has given to all mankind, as all descending from one original, consisting of like souls and bodies ; and, therefore, whatever rights one has by virtue of this nature, must be common to all, and equal in all.

2. "This is the law and the prophets."

That is, all the duties to our neighbour prescribed by Moses, or by the succeeding prophets under the Old Testament, are comprehended in this, and may be induced to it.

3. It is still more strongly enforced upon us by Christianity.

Our Lord and Master himself has left us this summary ; and that at the close of his most instructive sermons, wherein he hath so clearly and distinctly explained our duty in the most important particulars of it.

Let us now consider the vast usefulness and advantage of this measure of behaviour.

1. It is equally fit for the direction of all.

It is indeed so simple and obvious a measure of acting, that the plainest and most illiterate people, who are not capable of long and intricate reasonings, in order to the discovery of their duty, may receive light from it, as well as those of the most enlarged capacities and attainments.

2. It will be of singular use in sudden emergencies.

Many cases occur in life, wherein we have not time for long deliberation, but must speedily, and upon the spot, determine either to do or forbear a thing. Now this one general rule will hardly fail to furnish us with sufficient light for our immediate conduct in any part of social duty.

3. It will contribute to impartiality in judging concerning our duty to others.

By teaching us to change persons, and to suppose those concerned on the other side of the question to be our very selves.

4. This will minister light, both in what we ought to do, and in what we ought to forbear, toward other men.

To do to others what we have reason to insist that they should not do to us, is unjust and injurious; and not to do what we might reasonably desire at their hands, is, at least, unequal and uncharitable.

5. This will contribute to make our duty easy and pleasant.

It will sweetly draw us to our duty by the most ingenuous motives; and make those very considerations from ourselves, to push us on to a due behaviour to others.

6. It will be of service to discover and enforce our duty to others, in the whole compass of it. For example:

In common and general conversation.

In negotiation and commerce.

In cases where others need our compassion and kindness.

In censures and reflections upon others.

In case of provocations.

In the several relations of life.

Hence we may infer,

1. How happy it would be for the world, if the Christian institution was generally and heartily entertained.

2. Of what importance to the whole of religion and goodness, self-acquaintance and reflection are.

3. We may likewise hence infer, that God's commandments are not grievous.

They are founded in the reason of things; and our very nature, and most familiar sentiments, point to them.

4. We may hence see how inexcusable it must be, in reasonable creatures, especially those who profess Christianity, if they govern not themselves by this rule.

Let us, therefore, pray to God, that he will write this law in our hearts; for, if we feel this divine temper in us, it will be a happy presage of our arrival at last into the blessed world, where all the holy inhabitants act eternally with uninterrupted harmony and concert one towards another.

CHARITABLE JUDGING,

IN OPPOSITION TO CENSORIOUSNESS.

Judge not, that ye be not judged.—Matt. vii. 1.

It is proposed to explain,

I. The prohibition.

II. The motives on which it is inferred.

I. What is forbidden in the words, “Judge not.”

It is plain that Christ intends not absolutely to forbid any to use their own judgment; for this is a natural faculty given to us, as rational creatures, and which we are to use in the best manner we can. Neither are we absolutely forbidden to judge others: magistrates, ministers, and Christian societies, are required to censure evil-doers. Nor are even private persons forbidden to judge those to be ill men, who give flagrant proofs of their wickedness. We are forbidden,

1. Intermeddling and judging persons without any requisite cause.

We should not officiously pass sentence upon any person or thing, without just warrant or authority. We should not censure things out of our province, where we have no call to pass judgment. Nor should we judge of things above our reach, which either the defectiveness of our understandings, or the nature of the subject, renders such. Neither should we censure others without the authority of this rule; that is, we should not censure any as guilty of the crime, because they happen not to think or act as we: nor should we make sins, or duties, which God never made so.

2. Blind and rash judging.

We must not condemn men before we have clear and reasonable evidence of facts, and their circumstances; we must not raise suspicions into accusations, nor judge hardly merely from hearsay and common fame; we must not pass sentence without knowing what the party can say in their defence: nor without being apprized of the particular circumstances that led them into the actions in question: and we should make allowance for the special differences of people's cases.

3. Partial judging.

We should not judge from pique or dislike of the person, rather than of the evil: and our judgment should be equally extended to all who are equally concerned. We judge partially, when we judge others for things which we excuse in ourselves: or, when we censure smaller faults in others with more rigour, than greater of our own, though they should not be just of the same kind: or, when we condemn that strongly in an enemy, which passes for little or nothing in a friend.

4. Uncharitable judging.

This is done when we give way to suspicions and jealousies at random, without proper foundation; when we put the worst constructions on things that will admit of better; when we judge of men's thoughts and intentions, where their actions afford no room for reproach; when we judge of men's acceptance with God, upon grounds which are not decisive by the gospel; when we censure men in the lump, overlooking

their valuable qualifications ; when we impute to others opinions and consequences which they disown ; when we interpret calamities as judgments, from our dislike of persons ; when we are unwilling to admit fair tokens of repentance for faults ; when we publish the faults of others without occasion ; or, lastly, when we involve the innocent in a censure with the guilty.

II. The motives by which the prohibition is enforced : “ That ye be not judged.”

1. We should not be censorious of others, as ever we would not be served by men in the same kind.

Men who fish for scandal, are very often met with in their own way : and it seems to give a general satisfaction, when they are effectually exposed.

2. As we would escape the just judgment of God.

Without repentance we may expect he will severely animadvert on this sin, which is a direct invasion of God’s province. It is also very injurious to our neighbour ; and is a practice wherein we are self-condemned.

To conclude.

Let us resolve to maintain a good opinion of all, till we are obliged by evidence to quit it.

Recollect often the evils attending censoriousness.

Carefully avoid and mortify the usual incentives to this temper ; idleness, selfishness, pride, and party-zeal.

Think frequently of the number and greatness of our own faults, and our need of allowances, both from God and men.

Lastly. Think how gentle and long-suffering God hath been to us already : that if he enter into judgment with us, we can have no hope to eternity ; but that if we judge ourselves impartially, and our neighbours charitably, we shall not be judged.

THE DUTY OF SEEKING GOD.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy ; break up your fallow-ground : for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.—Hosea x. 12.

THE figurative language of scripture may, in some cases, obscure its import ; but when it is explained, it exhibits the plainest truths in a rich variety of forms, and tends to fix them on our minds by its attractive influence. We pray God that this observation may be verified, while we open the passage now before us, and consider,

I. The duty enjoined.

The three first expressions are explained by the prophet himself, as collectively importing, that we should “ seek the Lord ;” but separately taken, they point out the particular manner in which we should seek him.

1. In the performance of his will.

Though no man ever hopes to reap wheat, where he has sowed only tares, almost all expect to obtain heaven, notwithstanding they have never made it the one object of their pursuit. But the apostle guards against this fatal error, and assures us that we shall reap according to what we have sown ; a joyful harvest in the day of judgment. Let us not be provoking God by a life of sin, but turn to him in the way of righteousness ; nor let us regard the duties of the first or second table only ; but labour to fulfil all his will uniformly ; and without reserve.

2. In a dependence on his mercy.

As there are many who hope to find acceptance with God, notwithstanding they seek him not at all, so are there many who think they make God their debtor, by the works they perform ; and that they can earn heaven, as it were, by their own righteousness. But, however we may "sow in righteousness," we must "reap in mercy." Death is the wages of sin, but life is not the wages of righteousness. All our righteousnesses are imperfect : our best deeds are mixed with sin ; and therefore we must be contented to accept heaven as the unmerited gift of God, through Jesus Christ.

3. In a due preparation of heart to receive his blessings.

It would be in vain for a man to sow his seed on fallow ground : the very rain which God might send down upon it would be of no service, if the ground were not purged of its weeds, and the seed buried in the bosom of the earth. Thus, neither can the soul make a just improvement of spiritual blessings, unless it be broken up, as it were, by the divine law. Till this be done, the true way of salvation will appear foolishness. To be diligent in working righteousness, and, after all, to depend on mere mercy, will be thought paradoxical and absurd. But, when once the law is brought home to the conscience, in its spirituality and extent, the soul is made willing to submit to the righteousness of God ; and yet is induced to purify itself, even as God is pure. It was by this means that St. Paul was brought to a right mind ; nor is there any other way of combining diligence in exertion with an humble dependence on the divine favour. For the impressing this duty on our minds, let us consider,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced.

Confining ourselves to the hints suggested in the text we shall pass by many obvious and important arguments, and fix our attention upon,

1. The urgency of this duty.

At the proper seasons the husbandman goes forth to plough, or sow his ground, knowing that, if his work be neglected till the time for performing it be past, he shall have reason to repent of his neglect in the day of harvest. Let it be remembered, then, that this is the "time to seek the Lord." Are we advanced in years ? Surely we have no time to lose. Are we in the early part of life ? What time so fit as that of youth, before our habits be fixed, or our consciences seared, or our minds distracted by worldly cares ? As for aged persons, their lives must be drawing to a speedy close ; or, if protracted for a while, a want of mental energy will unfit their souls for spiritual exertions. And, with respect to those who are in the midst of youth, for aught they know, there may be "but a step between them and death." If any feel a dis-

position to serve the Lord, this is, in a peculiar manner, the time for them to seek his face. The very desire they feel, is an evidence God himself is working in them, and reveals himself to them : whereas, if they stifle the motions of his Spirit, they know not the grace which they so despise shall be ever offered to them again. Let us, then, "redeem the time" that is so precious, and improve the season which God has afforded us for this important work.

2. The certainty of success in it.

The husbandman knows that if his soil be not watered by seasonable rains, his labour will be wholly lost : yet, notwithstanding he cannot command the showers, he performs his labour, in hope that God will graciously send the former and the latter rain. But we have an absolute promise, that God will prosper our endeavours, and that "to him who soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward." Prov. xi. 18. Do we want a righteousness to justify us before God? He will clothe us in the unspotted robe of the Redeemer's righteousness. Do we want an inward righteousness, to qualify us for the enjoyment of his presence? He will work it in us by his good Spirit, and transform us into his own blessed image. Yea, he will "rain down righteousness upon us," giving us "abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness." Let this then encourage us ; for none ever sought his face in vain. Isa. xlv. 19.

Application.

Let us begin the first great work, by ploughing up of our fallow ground. We need not be told either the necessity or the reasonableness of this work, in husbandry : and a small acquaintance with the corruption and obduracy of an unrenewed heart, will supersede any attempts to evince the same in the cultivation of the soul. Only let it be remembered, that nothing but the law, opened in all its spirituality, and applied in all its awful sanctions, can ever effect us in this work. Let us study it more and more. Let us try ourselves by it. Let us bring our actions, words, and thoughts to it, as to a touchstone. Let us use it for the rooting out of all false principles and base affections. Thus shall our seed be sown to more advantage, and a glorious harvest await us in the day of the Lord Jesus.

THE GOOD OLD WAY.

Thus saith the Lord : Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.—Jer. vi. 16.

WHATEVER bears the stamp of antiquity upon it, finds, for the most part, a favourable reception in the world ; while innovations are admitted with caution and reserve. The gospel itself is often discarded, under the idea that it is new. Even as far back as the days of Jeremiah, serious religion was deemed a novelty ; but the prophet claimed the people's regard to it, no less from the consideration of its antiquity, than of its inherent excellence.

To elucidate the words before us, we shall inquire,

I. What is that old and good way here spoken of?

The explanation, which our Lord himself has given of this passage, shows that we are not to confine its import to holiness alone, but must understand it as comprehending,

1. A penitential affiance in God.

Christ declares that he himself "is the way," the only way to the Father. John xiv. 6. To him we must come, trusting in his mediation and intercession, and looking for acceptance through him alone. Now this is certainly the old way, marked out by all the Jewish sacrifices, and trodden by Abel and our first parents. Nor can we doubt of its being the good way, since it is appointed of God himself, and has been approved by all his saints from the beginning of the world.

2. A cheerful obedience to him.

Our Lord expressly says, "Take my yoke upon you;" Matt. xi. 29; nor can this ever be dispensed with. Though faith in Christ be the way of acceptance with God, yet obedience to him is the only means of manifesting the sincerity of our faith. Hence, holiness is by the prophet called "the Lord's highway." This, too, is of great antiquity; and must be traced up through prophets and patriarchs to the days of "righteous Abel." And it must be acknowledged to be good, since it tends so much to the perfecting of our nature, and to the adorning of our holy religion.

This, however, is not a mere speculative point; as we shall see, if we inquire,

II. What is our duty with respect to it.

God having so plainly revealed it to us, it becomes us all,

1. To inquire after it.

We should not go on in a presumptuous confidence that we are right; but should "stand and see," and attentively consider, whither we are going. We should ask of those whom God has appointed to be as waymarks to the people, and whose lips should not keep but dispense knowledge. Moreover, we should search the sacred oracles, (which, as a map, delineate our path with infallible precision,) comparing, with them, the various steps we have taken; and noticing, with care, the footsteps of Christ and his apostles. Not, however, trusting in our own researches; we should, above all, implore the teaching and directions of God's Holy Spirit, who would bring us back from our wanderings, and "guide our feet into the way of peace." Isa. lix. 8.

2. To walk in it.

To possess knowledge will be of little service, unless it produce a practical effect. Having found the right way, we must come into it, renouncing every other path, how pleasant or profitable soever it may have been. Nor must we only get into it, but "walk therein" continually; neither diverted from it by allurements, nor discouraged in it by any difficulties. Whatever advances we may have made, we are still to prosecute the same path, trusting in Christ as our advocate with God, and rendering to him an uniform and unreserved obedience.

Nor will this appear hard to us, if we consider,

III. The encouragement given us to perform this duty.

To those who are out of this way, whatever they may boast, we are sure there is no solid peace; but they who walk in it shall find rest,

1. In their way.

Sweet is the rest which a weary and heavy-laden sinner finds in Jesus Christ: he sees in his blood a sufficiency of virtue to expiate all his guilt, and to cleanse him from all his sin: he perceives that the foundation of his hope is sure and immovable; and, therefore, "having peace in his conscience, he rejoices in hope of the glory of God." Rom. v. 1, 2. In the way of holy obedience he enjoys, moreover, a present and a great reward; for while he rests from turbulent passions and tormenting fears, he finds that "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."

2. In their end.

If the ungodly have no peace in this world, much less have they in the world to come; but the obedient believer will enjoy perfect rest, when he shall have ceased from his present labours. "There is a rest remaining for the people of God;" and such a rest as neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived. At the instant of their dismissal from the body, they shall be borne on the wings of angels into the regions of the blessed, and lie in the bosom of their Lord to all eternity.

Address,

1. To those who disregard religion.

You indeed may plead long prescription (even from the days of Cain) and general practice, too, in favour of your habits; but do you doubt which is the better way? Do you not in your hearts envy those who walk in the good old way, and wish that you were able to live as they live? If, then, you would not persist in following a track, which you knew would lead to a place extremely distant from that which you were desirous to reach, attend to the warning now given, and turn unto God in the way marked out for you in his gospel.

2. To those who seek indeed the paths of religion, but find no rest in them.

There are many who approve of coming to Christ for salvation, but wish to be excused from taking his yoke upon them; while others, on the contrary, would be content to render obedience to his law, if they might be at liberty to decline the humiliating method which he has prescribed for their acceptance with God. Others, again, profess to approve of the good old way: but cannot renounce the cares and pleasures of the world, which retard their progress in it. No wonder, then, if such persons find no solid rest: indeed, it is well for them that they do not, since it would only deceive them to their eternal ruin. If we would have rest, either here or hereafter, it must be obtained in the way that has been pointed out; nor can it be obtained in any other to all eternity.

3. To those who are walking comfortably in the good way.

Be not contented to go to heaven alone, but labour in your respective spheres to bring others along with you. This was the disposition of the church of old, and should be the desire of all who have a hope towards God. It is scarcely to be conceived how much the exertions of

Christians in their several families would extend the benefits of ministerial labours. The public ministration of the word would be far better attended, and incomparably more improved. Since, then, all are commanded to seek instruction, let all endeavour to communicate it. So will the good way be more frequented, and more abundant blessings flow down on all who walk in it.

CHRISTIAN PRUDENCE.

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.—Matt. x. 16.

OUR Saviour, having represented to his disciples their danger, in being sent forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, gives them here a double advice; viz. “To be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves;” or, to unite in their conduct prudence and innocence: a direction which, though it comprehends in its original address a special commission, may be considered as intended for general use.

It is proposed, (1.) Briefly to consider and explain the double direction given us; (2.) to point at some principal instance, wherein we shall find Christian prudence, in conjunction with innocence, very necessary and serviceable; and (3.) to enforce the exhortation from the description of our state in this world.

Our author proposes,

I. Briefly to explain the double direction given us, beginning with the last.

1. We are required to be harmless.

Keeping a conscience void of offence towards God and man, and ourselves. Towards God, whom we should not wrong of any of his rights, by neglecting any part of our homage and allegiance; for this would be injustice offered to him, though he is altogether above receiving any real prejudice from us. Towards our neighbour, by refusing none of his just claims upon us, nor depriving him of his rights, either in his person, or substance, or reputation. Towards our own souls, being true to their interests, their present peace and purity, and their everlasting happiness. And a due provision may, and ought to be made for our temporal well-being, as far as may consist with our superior engagements.

2. In connexion with this, we are required to be wise as serpents: and therefore, 1. no rules of policy are to be observed which are inconsistent with innocence and a good conscience.

For to observe these to compass a bad end, or knowingly to use unlawful means to obtain a good one, are an abomination to God; are inconsistent with simplicity and godly sincerity; and pass the line of known duty, beyond which we must not suffer ourselves to go, upon any pretence of convenience or prudence.

3. The wisdom to which we are directed, is that by which we may be effectually enabled to discern and discharge our duty.

Having fixed a right end, it is the province of Christian prudence to find out the most suitable means for attaining it ; to judge of the proper seasons for every duty, that one may not interfere with another ; and to discern, when circumstances are intricate, on which side of a question duty lies.

II. To consider some principal instances wherein Christian prudence, in conjunction with innocence, is very necessary and serviceable.

1. Prudence is necessary to direct our duty to God himself.

The aid of prudence, even when the heart is truly devoted to God, is needful to facilitate the practice of piety, to promote the pleasure and the lustre of it. To omit any branch of real piety, to avoid the reproach of profane persons, or to make our end in religious exercises, to be seen of men, is carnal policy. But it is Christian prudence to avoid any such indecencies in our devotions as may unnecessarily give offence, or occasion censure. It will teach us to accommodate ourselves in our frames and actions, and to regulate the time, and manner, and length of our devotions. The time should be, that wherein we may expect to be most lively and least interrupted ; the manner, that wherein our minds are most free ; and it is generally most expedient that our devotions be rather frequent than long and tedious : and this should especially be avoided in family-worship, lest we occasion a disgust of religion.

2. Prudence is of use to discover the bias of our own constitutional tempers, to discern the devices of Satan, to descry temptations, and to direct us to avoid them ; and it is of vast service in making the interests of soul and body consistent, and our care of both happily comport together. We may often avoid, by innocent prudence, temporal inconveniences for our profession ; and this we should endeavour, as far as they may lawfully be avoided. And so far as we are governed by it, we shall not be so liable to sufferings brought upon ourselves by needless provocations or indiscretions.

3. Prudence is necessary in the successful discharge of our duty to our neighbour.

As far as may be done without sinful compliances, ministers and private Christians should study to render themselves acceptable, in order to be useful ; accommodating themselves to men's capacities and prepossessions, and condescending thereunto by an easy behaviour and prudent address, in order to serve them in their everlasting interest. Prudence is peculiarly requisite in reproving them for their sins ; it is also necessary for the management of our own outward affairs with discretion, to distinguish the most proper objects of charity, and to proportion the measures of our bounty to the extent and importance of occasions. Prudence is of equal use in common conversation, to judge when it is fit to speak, and when to keep silence ; to consider the different tempers, expectations, and views of those with whom we converse ; and so to order our conversation, that nothing may ever drop from us to offend, much less to corrupt their minds ; and that we may be frequent in religious, improving discourse.

III. To enforce the exhortation, we are desired to consider the state of Christians in this world, in which they are as sheep in the midst of wolves.

In danger from the devil, as a roaring lion, seeking to devour ; and as an old serpent, seeking to seduce. But the danger here suggested is principally from men. Good men are imperfect ; and there may be danger from their imperfections. But the number of bad, in the best times, calls especially for prudence to prevent their reproaching us or our profession ; for which they will gladly lay hold of our real crimes, or, in defect of them, our imprudences. The holy scriptures are recommended as fitted to be of singular use to our improvement in prudent conduct by the way, as well as to make us wise unto salvation ; and the proverbs of Solomon, and the pattern of Christ, should especially be studied to this purpose. The lives of wise and good men may furnish us with several profitable hints, to make us wise and better ; and especially experience and careful observation of men and things around us, and principally of ourselves and our own conduct.

But, together with the utmost of our care and improvement in this needful skill, by other means, let us daily ask wisdom of God, and his guidance and conduct, which will be our best security through a dangerous world, and bring us to glory at the end of life.

THE SLUGGARD SENT TO THE ANT

TO OBTAIN INSTRUCTION.

Go to the ant, &c.—Prov. vi. 6—8.

SINCE man's apostasy from God, he is often sent in the scriptures to learn his duty from the meanest creatures : his ingratitude is reprov'd ; Isa. i. 3 ; his inattention to Divine Providence, and neglecting the proper seasons of activity, are condemned ; his excessive worldly cares and unbelieving anxieties are censured. Luke xii. 24. And in the text, to cure us of negligence and sloth, Solomon sends us to a creature of the smallest size, but of surprising activity. Let us first consider the character to whom this advice is addressed. The sluggard's picture is so well drawn in this and in the book of Ecclesiastes, that we soon may be acquainted with it. Sloth is certainly not confined to the common affairs of life only ; but the character of a sluggard is applicable to men of every description, who are not earnestly working out their salvation with fear and trembling. The laborious mechanic, the busy merchant, the painful student, and the bustling statesman, are all sluggards in a spiritual sense, unless they are active in the love and service of the God that made them. It may be added, that even those who have chosen the better part, have too much of this disposition remaining in them. Ps. cxix. 37.

Let us now consider the good counsel here given.

1. The ant instructs us not by a speech but by actions ; and therefore we must consider her ways not merely to gratify laudable curiosity, or increase our knowledge of natural history, but that we may become wiser and better.

2. The ant teaches us foresight, making provision for the time to come.

How dreary must the winter of his life be, whose youth has been spent in criminal idleness and sin; and who has never seriously considered for what purpose he came into the world, till he is forced by disease, and the dreadful approach of death, to think of leaving it! And, above all, how will the horror of the slothful servant be increased, when he hears the Judge pronounce the final sentence!

3. Activity and diligence. She never remits her labours while the season lasts.

4. Prudence in embracing the properest season in doing her necessary work. It is plain, if summer and harvest were neglected by the ant, her work must be entirely left alone: this she knows; and though she has no guide to go before, and mark out her task, none to superintend or prompt her to labour; none to require an account of her industry, or to punish her neglect; yet she never forgets her labour, or pretends weariness as an excuse from her necessary work.

We may draw some useful inferences from this subject.

1. The Sluggard offends against the very nature of things; for what are all the high powers and faculties with which a man is endowed, but so many intimations that he is formed for active service?

2. He offers violence to that inclination of mind which is so natural to man: this the spiritual sluggard clearly discovers by the wicked and often laborious methods he finds out and practises in wasting his time and talents.

3. He sins against the manifest design of Providence: for though God liberally supplies our returning wants, yet he certainly requires us to labour even for the necessities of life.

4. He sets himself against the designs of our gracious Redeemer, who gave himself for us, not to procure a patent for idleness and sloth, but to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. Let us hear and reverence the language of the gospel; and let us be no longer slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. We shall have time enough to rest from our labours, when an abundant entrance is ministered unto us in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

THE

EXPEDIENCY OF CHRIST'S REMOVAL.

It is expedient—not only for me, but for you, that I go away.

John xvi. 7.

THE expediencies of Christ's departure will appear, if we observe,

1. It was so appointed in the divine councils, and they cannot be altered. Shall the earth be forsaken for thee? He that gives freely, may recall one gift before he bestows another; whilst we would fondly hold all.

2. It is suitable that the ambassador-extraordinary should be recalled, before the envoy come that is constantly to reside.

3. The sending of the Spirit was the fruit of Christ's purchase, and that was to be made by his death, which was his going away.

4. It was to be the effect of his intercessions within the veil. It must be both purchased and prayed for, that we might learn to put this greater value upon it.

5. The great argument used by the Spirit, in convincing the world, was Christ's ascension as our forerunner to heaven.

6. Christ's bodily presence could be only in one place at one time; but his spiritual every where, in all places, at all times, wherever two or three are gathered together in his name.

7. The first might attract their eyes, the last must attract their hearts.

II. The work of the Spirit is to reprove or convince.

1. Ministers are reprovers by office. But the Spirit, by the word, conscience, and providence, convinces of sin. To convince is a law-term, and denotes the office of a judge in summing up the evidence, and setting any matter that has been accurately examined, in a clear and just light.

2. To put to silence the adversaries of Christ and his cause, by demonstrating the falsehood of that which they had maintained, and the truth and certainty of that which they had opposed. Man may open the cause, but the Spirit only can open the heart. The method here taken is,

To convince, and then to comfort; to open the wound, and then apply the medicine. The conviction of sinners is the joy and comfort of faithful ministers.

3. The Spirit does not barely tell, but clearly convinces; proves it against him, and forces him to own and confess it. John viii. 9.

4. The Spirit convinces of the *fact*, the *fault*, the *folly*, the *foundation*, and the *fruit of sin*.

5. But especially of unbelief, as the great reigning sin, which binds the guilt of all other sins upon us, and is that which alone can ruin us under the gospel. Natural religion, after it has given us our best discoveries, lays and leaves us under this further obligation, that whatsoever revelation shall be made to us, with sufficient evidence to prove it divine, it is our indispensable duty to accept it; which they transgress who refuse him that speaketh from heaven.

6. It is a sin against the remedy, and is at the bottom of all others. The true reason why sin reigns in the world is, all men have not faith.

7. Of righteousness. 1 John ii. 1. Luke xxiii. 47, 1 Tim. iii. 16. Their seeing him no more in the form of a servant will partly contribute to this. Moses was more respected after his removal than before; but his going to the Father, and sending the Spirit, would only confirm it; Acts ii. 36; for the holy God would never set a deceiver at his own right hand. Dan. ix. 24. Rom. x. 3.

8. Of judgment. The devil is here called the prince of this world. He is the great deceiver and destroyer of mankind, and as such, judgment was entered against him, and execution done in part, when he was cast out of the gentile world; his oracles silenced, and his altars deserted; then he fell as lightning from heaven.

9. By the judgment of the prince of this world, it appears that

Christ is *stronger* than Satan, and can easily discern and dispossess him of every stronghold. Luke xi. 21. Matt. xii. 18.

10. Satan is the great master of all misrule; and, when the author of all evil is finally expelled, the Lord shall again rejoice in his works, and pronounce them very good.

11. Of the absolute dominion of the Lord Jesus. If the prince of this world be judged and destroyed, no other power can stand before him.

And, lastly, at the general judgment, all the enemies of his gospel and kingdom shall certainly be reckoned with; for the devil, their great prince and leader, is judged.

THE NECESSITY OF HOLINESS.

Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.—Heb. xii. 14.

THE gospel, while it brings us into a state of reconciliation with God, enjoins us to maintain peace with man. This is rendered difficult, not only by the evil dispositions that are exercised on account of daily occurrences, but more especially by the enmity which subsists in the hearts of the generality with respect to religion; in reference to which, our Lord himself said, “I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword.” Matt. x. 34. Much, however, may be done by means of peace, meekness, and forbearance; and it is our duty to sacrifice any thing, except a good conscience, for the sake of peace. But our duty to God is paramount to every other consideration; therefore, the apostle, exhorting the Hebrews to “follow peace with all men,” adds immediately, “and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:” the import of which is, that we may fail in obtaining peace, however earnestly we may seek it; but holiness we may, and must attain, at the peril of our souls; for without it no man shall see the Lord. We shall,

I. Ascertain the nature of holiness.

Holiness is a conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. But, to enter more fully into the subject, it implies,

1. That we love the whole will of God.

There is not any thing that more truly characterizes a Christian than this; it draws a line of distinction between him and other persons upon earth. The self-righteous pharisee, and the most refined hypocrite, have secret objections against the law of God; they think its precepts too strict, and its sanctions too severe. They would be glad if it left them somewhat greater latitude. They would be content that it should forbid gross outward sins, and insist on the performance of outward duties: but it should call for continual self-denial, that it should require brokenness of heart and contrition for the most secret offences, and demand the utmost exertion of all our faculties in the service of our God, this appears too much; they would wish for an easier way to heaven.

But a person that possesses the smallest measure of true holiness, is the very reverse of this. He loathes himself for not complying more perfectly with the demands of the law: but he never condemns the law

as too strict: he would not have it require one jot or tittle less than it does. He even admires and loves it for its purity: he says with David, "The commandment of the Lord is pure, therefore thy servant loveth it." He acknowledges it to be not only "holy, and just, but good" also, and calculated to make every one happy that obeys it. And though he cannot obey it perfectly, he can truly say, "I delight in the law of God after my inward man;" yea, the language of his heart is, "O that my ways were so directed, that I might keep thy statutes!" Ps. cxix. 5.

2. That we live in no allowed deviation from it.

We mean not to say, that a Christian experiences no deviations from the law of God; for, alas! he is conscious of many; but he does not allow them. Others will obey the will of God as far as will consist with their interests and reputation, or with the exception of some bosom-sin: but there will always be found, in sincere persons, some secret lust against which they plead, and in reference to which they say, "Pardon thy servant in this thing." 2 Kings v. 18.

But true holiness admits of no reserves, no limitations, no exceptions; and he who possess it will stop short of nothing that God has commanded. He may do what is wrong, either through ignorance or temptation, but he will not persist in it: he will endeavour to mortify the whole body of sin. He will no more allow himself in secret sins, whether of omission or of commission, than he will commit the greatest enormities: like David, he says, "I esteem thy commandments concerning all things to be right; therefore, I hate every false way:" Ps. cxix. 104: that is, I love the ways of duty, so that I would walk in them, even if there were no reward; and I hate the ways of sin, so that I would shun them, though I were sure never to incur punishment.

3. That we actually grow in conformity to it.

Sanctification is a progressive work. A child arrives not at full stature but by degrees. He is constantly growing in graces: the vernal bloom gradually advances to the autumnal fruit. There may indeed be seasons wherein he may appear to decline, or may really suffer a declension; but if he have the grace of God in his heart, he will revive, and return to God with more fervour and stedfastness. Nor will he ever think he has already attained perfection; but, "forgetting the things that are behind, he will reach forward unto that which is before."

This is in no respect the case with others. They are satisfied with their present state; they are not conscious of their defects; and therefore they feel no longings for higher attainments. They are like a painted sun upon the canvass, while the true Christian "grows up into Christ in all things, as his living head;" and, like the sun in the firmament, "shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day." Prov. iv. 18.

Having, in this description of holiness, marked the lowest degree of it that exists in a true Christian, we proceed,

II. To show the grounds on which it is necessary in order to salvation. If we are not able to assign any reason for God's determination, it would be quite sufficient for us to know that he has issued his decree. It is not for us to dispute, but to submit, saying, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Gen. xviii. 25.

But there is one obvious ground on which the necessity of holiness

is indisputable, namely, that "in the very nature of things it is impossible without it to enjoy the Divine presence."

If heaven were a place suited to a carnal mind, and afforded the gratifications which unregenerate men affect, then, indeed, unholy men might find such happiness there, as in their state they are capable of receiving. But heaven is a holy place; the habitation of a holy God: it is filled with myriads of holy men and angels, who are exercising themselves incessantly in the holy employments of praise and adoration. What, then, would there be in that place suited to the taste of an unholy man? Could those whose spirits were defiled with sin, and who had never been purged from its guilt by the atoning blood of Christ, find pleasure in the presence of God, who being omniscient, could not but discern their state, and being holy, could not but regard them with abhorrence? Would not a consciousness of his power terrify them, and a recollection that he had once cast innumerable angels out of heaven, appal them? Could they delight in the society of the glorified saints whom they so little resemble, or find communion with them in exercises, which were here their burden and aversion? We are fully assured, that "as the tree falleth, so it lieth;" Eccl. xi. 3; that "he who is unjust, will be unjust still; and he who is filthy, will be filthy still." Rev. xxii. 11. Has it been the one desire of our hearts to honour and enjoy God? If secret intercourse with him in our chambers, and social fellowship with him in the public assembly, have been a mere task, and not the delight of our souls, how can we suppose that we should instantly find a delight in these things in heaven? How could we endure to spend an eternity there in employments for which we had no taste? We are told, that there is a "meetness for the inheritance of the saints;" Col. i. 12; and that we must have that meetness before we could enjoy the Divine presence, even if we were admitted into it. Christ must be precious to us now, if we would find him so in the eternal world: and we must account it our supreme felicity to enjoin him now, if we would hereafter join the chorus of saints and angels, in ascribing "salvation to God and to the Lamb for ever." Rev. vii. 10. In short, holiness, real holiness of heart, is as necessary to the enjoyment of the Divine presence, as a taste for music, or literature, is for the company and employments of musical or literary men. As we soon grow weary of things which we do not affect, and prefer any other employment that is more suited to our inclination and capacity, so most assuredly must it be even in heaven, if our natures be not changed: we shall remain for ever destitute of those qualities which constitute our meetness for the heavenly inheritance, and consequently be for ever incapable of participating in the joys of heaven.

This may at least be sufficient to illustrate the declaration in the text; perhaps we may add also, to vindicate it. Not that any declaration of God is to be judged of by the reasons which fallible men may assign in vindication of it: his word is the same, whether we believe it or not; nor shall one jot or title of it ever fail.

This subject cannot but suggest to our minds the following reflections:

1. How few are there that will eventually be saved!

Take the foregoing explanation of holiness, and compare it with the state of all around us, how awful the contrast ! But God is true, and his word respecting the unholy shall surely stand. Let us "seek then, yea, strive, to enter in at the strait gate, and to walk in the narrow path." Luke xiii. 24. Let us follow holiness with all our might. Whatever we may think, it is in that way alone that we can behold the face of God in peace.

How needful is it that we should seek holiness in a right way !

The generality are extremely ignorant respecting the manner in which holiness is to be obtained ; they have an idea that they must acquire it by some exertion of their own ; whereas they *should* seek it from Christ, through the operation of his Spirit in their hearts. They should first seek to be united to him by faith, as scions to the stock of a tree, or as a wife to her husband ; then, by virtue derived from him, they will be made fruitful in good works, and be "changed into his image, in righteousness and true holiness."

THE BELIEVER'S DYING-DAY

BETTER THAN HIS BIRTH-DAY.

A good name, &c.—Eccl. vii. 1.

NEVER did any in a more lively manner represent the vanity of all sublunary things than Solomon. He represents human life, in its best shapes, as a heap of vanity. All lasting consolation must be brought not from this, but another and a better world, for Solomon assures us "a good name," &c. Endeavour,

I. To illustrate these two propositions, "a good name," &c. "And the day of death," &c.

II. Make some improvement.

I. Illustrate the two propositions :

A "good name." A good name must have religion for its foundation. Some men have attempted to raise themselves a name from their valour, honour, and beauty : these may make a vain name ; but without religion, they will go out with a stink. "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance." Ps. cxii. 6.

A good name, in the sight of heaven, must have real religion for its foundation ; a mere show is but a vain and empty thing. A profession only will but make a name before men. "I know you not." Those who are personally united to Jesus Christ, who can say with the apostle, "I live, yet not I," &c. "For me to live is Christ." Those who are upright and useful in their generation, have the best and the most honourable name given them. They have a name better than the names of sons and daughters, "a friend of God : " this was a name given to Abraham. It is a name given to all the children of faithful Abraham, "ye are my friends." John xv. 14.

"A good name is better than precious ointment." This was highly prized in the eastern countries.

1. Better than all worldly riches, which go under the name of oil. "And of Asher he said, Let him dip his foot in oil;" Deut. xxxiii. 24; but a good name is better than all the riches of the world. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." Prov. xxii. 1. See Lazarus and the rich man.

2. It is better than worldly pleasures and sensual delights, expressed by ointment and perfume. Prov. xxvii. 9. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; but a good conscience, which is always consequent on a good name, rejoices it more. "This is our rejoicing, if our hearts condemn us not."

3. It is better than all worldly honours; for kings were anointed to testify the conferring that dignity on them. The honours of this world cannot make the subjects happy, they may be miserable: at the best, the honourable cannot take their honour. A good name will not only afford happiness in time, but go with us: "Blessed are the dead; a good name," &c. "and the day of death, than the day of one's birth."

This may appear a paradox to some, but Solomon declares it. And we shall attempt to illustrate the truth. We learn that he who has a birth-day, whatever he is in his life, must have a dying-day: "It is appointed." A birth-day, however, is a good day. Let us not do as Job, chap. iii. 3; or Jeremiah, xx. 14; but if we properly improve life, our dying-day may be still better.

1. The day of our birth clothes us with a body of weak and frail flesh, which is a clog to our better part; the day of the good man's death frees him from this clog. 2 Cor. v. 1—4. Luke ii. 29.

2. In the day of our birth we are helpless infants, incapable of social pleasure or spiritual delights. But in the day of the Christian's death, he will show himself intelligent and active, a companion of angels. Heb. xii. 22. Luke xx. 36.

3. In the day of our birth we are exposed to danger. Diseases and afflictions await us through every period of life; but the day of death sets the man of God beyond danger. Rev. vii. 14—17.

4. In the day of our birth we are born to die, but in the day of death the believer dies to live.

5. The day of the saint's death carries him into a better world than the day of his birth. His birth brings him into a world of toil and labours, a wilderness; death carries him into a world of rest, a Canaan. His birth brings him into a world of care and sorrow; death, of ease and joy; a world of happiness, exceeding expectation; "eye hath not seen," &c. 1 Cor. ii. 9.

6. The day of a Christian's death settles him among better company than the day of his birth, the family of heaven.

7. The day of the saint's death brings him to, and settles him in, better exercise and employment than the day of his birth. Rev. iv. 8.

II. Improvement:

1. That if a good name cost us something, it cannot be too dearly bought; it will make us cheerful and happy, and outlive every thing beside. Abraham was rich in silver and gold; but his good name has outlived them all. Let us, therefore, be anxious for this good name.

2. Whatever the saint of God has in hand, he has more in hope, and

therefore his dying-day is his best ; like an heir who has been torn from his father.

3. No wonder that sinners should desire to “ die the death of the righteous,” &c. Num. xxiii. 10.

THE WRATH OF GOD TO SINNERS.

Because there is wrath.—Job xxxvi. 18.

IN general it is the wrath of God.

1. Righteous wrath, if it be the wrath of God, cannot be otherwise. “ He is our rock, there is no unrighteousness in him, just and right is he.” He reveals his love and mercy to sinners in the clearest and fullest manner ; sinners refuse and rebel, therefore it is just and righteous in God to pour out his wrath on the finally impenitent. Heb. x. 28, 31.

2. It is such a wrath as arises from the patience of God, tired and worn out by the bold iniquity of persevering sinners. He has revealed himself as the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering. He now waits to be gracious, but he will not always keep silence. Consider this, ye that forget God : he will at last say, concerning obstinate sinners, as concerning the Jews, Jer. xv. 5, 6.

3. It is wrath without mercy, because they are a people of no understanding.

4. Everlasting. Rev. xiv. 11.

Because there is wrath, where is it ?

1. This wrath is revealed in the word. Deut. xxix. 18—20. As the love of God is revealed in the threatenings.

2. As wrath is heard from his mouth, so it is seen in his hand, wrath in the judgment of God, here. Num. xvi. 46. More especially hereafter, when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven : that is called the “ great day of his wrath.” Rev. vi. 16, 17.

Because there is wrath, why is there wrath ? Sin is the cause. The wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ; rejecting of Christ. “ If the word spoken by angels ; ” — “ he that believeth not, the wrath of God abideth on him.” John iii. 36.

Beware of offending God, of rejecting Christ. Beware, this intimates that though there be wrath, yet there is a way to escape : beware, fly from sin, come out from among the ungodly, embrace the Saviour, “ kiss the Son ; ” Ps. ii. 12 ; follow him in the regeneration, and thus flee from “ the wrath to come.”

II. The argument to enforce the exhortation, “ lest he take thee away with his stroke,” &c. Not, lest he strike thee ; the Lord often strikes, not in wrath, but in love ; but, lest he take thee away with his stroke.

1. This intimates the certainty of the event ; “ the axe is already laid at the root of the tree ; ” Matt. iii. 10 : the Lord has bent his bow, and if we attend not to his call, he will not only strike, but take us away with his stroke.

2. This intimates not only that the Lord will do it, but he may do it suddenly without any more warning. He once threatened, Nah. i. 9, that afflictions should not rise a second time; Nadab and Abihu, Lev. x. 1, 2. Thus Herod, Acts xii. 23.

3. It imports, announces, and supposes, that it is not only certain, and may be sudden, but that it may be visible. Job xxvii. 20—23.

“Then a great ransom cannot deliver thee.”

1. A ransom is that which is paid for the deliverance of a captive; thus Christ gave himself a ransom for sinners. There is a twofold ransom; the people of God are sometimes delivered by one, but always by the other. They are sometimes delivered by the destruction or ruin of the wicked: hence Solomon, “the wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous;” Prov. 21, 18; for the Lord will destroy the wicked to deliver his own people. “I will give Egypt for thy ransom.” Isa. xliii. 3. Sooner than Israel shall not be delivered, the Egyptians shall be destroyed. Thus, he makes the wicked a ransom for the righteous. “The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.” Prov. xi. 8.

2. A ransom that never fails, is the blood of the covenant. “Ye are not your own. He gave himself a ransom for many.” 1 Tim. ii. 6. This is a ransom that sets us free indeed.

But there are causes in which this ransom does not avail.

Obstinate, impenitent sinners, despairing sinners, and apostatizing sinners, “a great ransom shall not,” &c. Job xxxvi. 18. Heb. vi. 4—8. Men are sometimes ransomed by their riches: will he regard thy riches, greatness, crying? Some are ransomed by might, some escape in the night.

REMEMBERING CHRIST'S WORDS,

THE BEST ANTIDOTE AGAINST UNBELIEF, &C.

And they remembered his words.—Luke xxiv. 8.

LET us, first, briefly consider the distressing frame of mind our Lord's first disciples were now in, and the means of their deliverance from it. Secondly, The blessedness of remembering Christ's words, in and under all our various circumstances. And, if the Lord is pleased to give us light and liberty, we shall see much of our own case and experience herein. The Lord grant we may, to the humbling our souls before him, establishing our faith in him, and obtaining comfort from him.

I. The distressing frame of mind which our Lord's disciples were now in.

1. They were deprived of his presence. He had been violently taken from them; unjustly and inhumanly crucified before them: and, not only was his holy life taken away, but his precious body, also, as they thought, stolen out of the sepulchre. Hence, their perplexity was very great; their doubts many: their faith ran low; their reason was nonplussed. They were ready to stagger through unbelief. Their hope was at the last gasp, and they were ready to give up, and give over all for

lost; for all appearances were against them. This was a season of great calamity and sore distress to them.

2. How they were delivered from these trying and distressing circumstances. Mind, these disciples, though all in nature and appearance was against them, yet they came early to the sepulchre on the Lord's day, to seek him. Though their Lord was dead, the joy of faith failed, and the comfort of hope fled; yet duty was theirs, and they pursued it. They did not indulge sloth, though they were not warm and comfortable in their frames; much less did they go to Satan's fire of sinful diversions, the pleasures of sense, and the vanities of the world, to warm them. No, their hearts were set on Christ. The desire of their souls was to him. They sought him. They pursued every means to find him. They gave not over till they heard good tidings of him: yea, till they actually saw him whom their souls loved. Most excellent lesson to us. For, whatever may be our frames and feelings, however gloomy and discouraging our circumstances; yet seeking the Lord, and using all means to obtain the sense of his presence, and the comfort of his love, ought never to be neglected by us; but should ever be our unremitting study, and our constant practice.

3. For our encouragement to this, see, in the midst of their perplexity, how graciously the Lord dealt with them. "Behold two men in shining garments stood by them." Ver. 4. What a proof of the Divinity of our Lord, and of his love to his disciples! As the God of the whole earth, and the Lord of the heavenly host, he sent these angels to testify of him, and that his human body was raised from the dead. "Thus, they are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Heb. i. 14. What do they minister? First, a tender expostulation: "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Ver. 5. Secondly, a joyful declaration: "He is not here, but is risen." Ver. 6. Thirdly, a precious excitation to their memory; "Remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet in Galilee, saying, that the Son of man *must* be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and rise again the third day." Luke xxiv. 7.

4. What was the consequence of this ministry of angels? A most blessed one. These disciples remembered Christ's words, and returned from the sepulchre greatly satisfied, and much comforted. But why this round-about way to bring to pass this end? Why did not our Lord himself appear to them, and at once solve their doubts, relieve their perplexity, and scatter their fears? or, why not, by the sovereign agency of his Spirit, effect this on their minds? In this and every other of his dealings, let us bow to his Divine sovereignty, and adore his infinite wisdom. He cannot err. His ways are best. It is our duty to pray, and our wisdom to strive to profit by all. And he hereby teaches us these two things: First, that the ministry of his word is of his own appointing, for those very ends and purposes which he hath ordained; for he says, "My word shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please." Isa. lv. 11. Here is a sovereign declaration, and an absolute promise. The Lord's glory and truth are engaged in it. It is not left to the will and power of the minister who dispenses it; nor to the caprice and humour of those who hear it; but to the agency and

power of God the Spirit, to make it effectual. Love, then, those ministers who preach Christ's word; but look through them to the Lord the Spirit, for his blessing to make the word profitable. "Therefore despise not prophesying or preaching." 1 Thess. v. 20. "Be not wise in your own conceits." Rom. xii. 16.

5. That it is our indispensable duty to attend upon the ministry of Christ's word; to read, study, pray over, and believe it. "Faith comes by hearing the word;" Rom. x. 17; and if Christ would not satisfy and comfort these his first disciples' hearts without his own words, what reason have we to expect he will ours? None at all. For he says, "He that will do my will, shall know of my doctrine." John vii. 17. His will is in his word. His word is his will. And by his word he accomplishes his will in us, and brings comfort to us. So these disciples found it. "They remembered his words." And so shall we, too, if we use the means for it. We shall experience the comfort and blessedness of it, also, as they did. Therefore, let us consider,

II. The blessedness of remembering Christ's words. Here is a large field for our meditation. Oh! that the Lord may help us to gather some balm of Gilead, aromatic spices, and flowers of consolation, for the healing and joy of our souls! What are we to understand by Christ's words? Doubtless, the whole of what God speaks in the scriptures. They are the words of God; and Christ is God: therefore, they are the words of Christ. Now, first, who and what art thou who readest or hearest these words? Be your state and situation in life what they may, I will answer for you in general, that you are a sinner, a dying sinner, inhabiting a body of sin and death, and breathing in a world of sorrow, trouble, and woe; and, therefore, that you have need to remember Christ's words, to support and comfort your mind. For they are the best and only antidote against the raging of our lusts, the working of unbelief, the suggestions of Satan, the troubles of life, and the fears of death. Let us meditate on each of these:

1. The raging of our lusts, and workings of unbelief. Pray distinguish here between the raging of lusts in us, and the reign of lusts over us. Our king may have many raging, rebellious subjects in his kingdom; but they do not reign over him, but he over them. Every Christian, in and under Christ, is a king and priest unto God. Rev. i. 6. By the power of Christ he reigns over his lusts; and by the grace of Christ he sacrifices them unto God. This is to be his constant work, for they will rage in him continually. Now, what have we to relieve and support our minds against these? Christ's words, and remembrance of them. For he speaks most tenderly and affectionately to such. When the disciples were in a storm, the comfort of faith forsook them, the joy of hope deserted them, and fears prevailed over them; yet, amidst all this, they discovered their faith, by going to Christ with "Lord, save, or we perish!" How did he behave to them? Tenderly expostulates with them, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" He instantly silenced the winds, smoothed the waves, and suppressed their fears. Matt. viii. 26. Why? because they had great faith, no lustings, no unbelief? nay, the contrary is evident. So, if Christ dwell in your heart by faith, though this faith may be strongly opposed by the raging of sense and the

working of unbelief, still, your faith will manifest itself, by remembering Christ's words, and crying unto him, "Lord, save, or I perish." Oh! this remembering Christ's words, calls up the exercise of faith, sets the soul in motion to Christ, puts honour upon Christ, and, as it were, awakens the power of Christ in our behalf.

2. Remembering Christ's words is the best antidote against Satan's suggestions. Christ is the God of truth; Satan the father of lies. All that he suggests is contrary to Christ's words, and makes God a liar. He is an enemy, a tempter, and an accuser. How are we to resist him? "Steadfast in the faith." 1 Pet. v. 9. What is this, but the truth of Christ's words which we believe? How are we to overcome him? "but by the word of the testimony of Christ." Rev. xii. 11. When Paul was buffeted by his suggestions and accusations, what answer got he from Christ? This precious one: "My grace is sufficient for thee." 2 Cor. xii. 9. No sinner can want more. Every believing sinner is interested in all this. For, whatever Satan may suggest to the contrary, Christ solemnly asserts, "He who believeth hath everlasting life; is passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation." John v. 24. Fight the devil with Christ's words, as Christ did with the word of God. But what is Christ's grace? His free favour, working out salvation for, and freely bestowing it on sinners. Satan will ever be suggesting against this, to the dishonour of Christ, and the distress of our souls: to the devil's shame, his emissaries' confusion, and our soul's comfort, hear Christ proclaim his own grace, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." John x. 28.

3. Remembering Christ's words is the antidote against the world's troubles. Why? because they support the soul under them, and lift it above them. Our troubles are all in the covenant, and from covenant-love to us. Christ is the head of the covenant. He says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Why? because it is his will; he knows we cannot do without trials. Therefore, we shall have them in number, weight, and measure, dealt out from the loving-kindness of our Lord. It is our blessedness to see the Lord's hand in all our troubles, and to remember his words under every one of them. Most affectionate words! "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." John xvi. 33. Peace and good cheer, in the midst of tribulations! Lord, increase our faith in thee and love to thee! But how is this peace and good cheer to be enjoyed? In Christ, and from him; for both result from the victory of him.

Lastly. Remember that Christ's words is the best antidote against the fears of death. Death is in our catalogue of mercies, and is one of our covenant-blessings. "Death is yours." Why so? because "ye are Christ's and Christ is God's." 1 Cor. iii. 22. How is this? Christ is God's Son; you are Christ's brethren. God is your Father in him. Therefore, death is your angel, your friend, your servant, to introduce you into the fullest enjoyment of God, your heavenly Father's love, God your Saviour's salvation, and God the Holy Spirit's everlasting comfort in the kingdom of heaven. True, natural fears will and may beset us, in re-

gard to death and dying ; but there is no way of overcoming them, but remembering Christ's words ; for he has most solemnly assured us, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death." John viii. 51. Marvellous ! What, shall he never die ? Yes : but he shall never see death in his dreadful form and horrid appearance, as an officer of justice, commissioned by a God of wrath to drag the soul to tormenting flames. But he shall see Christ, the resurrection and the life, who has conquered death, reigning over death, as his angel, to bring the soul to the enjoyment of himself, and to be with him in glory.

Inference.—By way of reproof. What is a Christian without Christ's words ? Naked and defenceless ; like a soldier surrounded by enemies, without arms. See, then, your folly who are unmindful of Christ's words. Hence it is that you live so much at random, and walk so uncertainly and uncomfortably. Have you really the peace of God in your heart ? Do you hesitate ? Are you in doubt of it ? What ! profess to be a believer in Christ, and not possess these ? How do you live ? What is your conduct ? Do you keep holy the Lord's day ? Do you walk in the Spirit every day ? Or, do you live after the flesh, give way to its lusts, and gratify its desires, by indulging yourself in carnal pleasures and worldly diversions ? One word to your ear, and may the Lord cause it to reach your heart ! As sure as you are a living sinner, you sadly forget both your Lord and his words ; yea, you pour contempt on both. Mind what he says, "He who taketh not up his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me." Matt. x. 38.

THE FOLLY OF RESISTING,
AND THE WISDOM OF COMPLYING
WITH THE GOSPEL-CALL.

He answered and said, I will not ; but afterwards he repented and went.
Matt. xxi. 29.

THE scope of this parable is to show, that many who have been the vilest of sinners repent, and go to heaven ; when others, who, though they make a profession of religion, never go farther than mere profession, and so fall short : partly, also to show that many, who have been publicans and harlots, are now in a better case than the chief priests and scribes. To convince us of this, Christ spoke the parable before us. For understanding of which, I would notice,—1. The man in the parable represents God ; 2. The two sons, different sorts of people among the Jews : both had the gospel-call by John the Baptist. The first of the sons points out the publicans and harlots, who, though they were formerly the most vile and hopeless creatures, yet on their hearing of John, repented, and became disciples indeed. The second represents the priests and pharisees, who, notwithstanding their high pretences to religion, yet were indeed strangers to it : their practices did not correspond with their profession.

I. To show what is that work to which the gospel calls, and with which sinners will not comply. It is the work of practical godliness, to which most men are strangers. It is a large work, as extensive as the commandment, which is exceeding broad. I shall take it up in these two.

1. The gospel calls you to fall to your salvation-work. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Phil. ii. 12. Sinners, you are in a ruined condition; your souls are pining away in your iniquities; there is a burden of guilt on you that will sink you; there is a swarm of living lusts preying on you that will devour you. Oh, guilty creature! knowest thou not that thou art God's enemy, justice's debtor, the law's criminal, and that the avenger of blood is at your heels? The gospel is calling you to consider your ways, and fall to the work of your salvation, before it be too late. This, sinner, is your work, your foundation-work. Haste then, out of your natural state, and escape for your life to Jesus Christ.

2. The work of sanctification. Ezek. xviii. 31. Heb. xiii. 12. Sin is the great devourer and destroyer, and, therefore, the great salvation is from sin. Jesus saves his people from their sins. To think of being saved in sin, is a contradiction; for to be left in it is ruining. The sick man does not desire the physician to remove death, but to spare his disease: yea, but the foolish sinner is thus unreasonable in the case of his soul; he has no will that his clothes be burnt, yet he will needs carry fire in his bosom: he wishes not his feet to be burned, yet he will walk on coals of fire. Living lusts will devour the soul; therefore, to work, sinners; for you must either kill or be killed. Let not the vineyard of our souls be any more like that of the sluggard. The sinners soul is overgrown with hurtful lusts, there is no fence about it. Oh! then, work; seek holiness.

3. The gospel calls you to your generation-work. "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep." Acts xiii. 36. Wherefore were you sent into the world, and made members of society? Was it not to honour God, and to be useful to your fellow-servants? Surely God sent none of us into the world to play with ourselves, like the leviathan in the sea. What have ye done for the good of any soul? What have ye done to pluck any brand out of the burning? I fear, if we reckon our days according to what we have done for God in them, most of us may reckon our days lost days. Look up to God, who placed you in the world, and say for what you have taken up room in his earth. For what use are you in the world? God has given you a talent, what have you gained? He had placed you in such and such situations and relations, have you done the duties of each? I am to show,

II. Why is it that sinners will not comply with this work?

1. Because it is the work to which, of all works, their hearts are most averse. Rom. viii. 7. They would rather do any thing than go and work in God's vineyard. It is against the grain with unrenewed minds. The prodigal would rather feed swine than go back to his father, till he came to himself. It is like cutting off a right hand and plucking out a right eye, till a day of power make him willing. Ps. cx. 3.

2. Because of prevailing love to carnal ease. The man loves to sleep in a sound skin, and therefore will die in his nest, if God do not in mercy set fire to it. Sloth is so sweet a sin, that the carnal heart can never get a fill of it. Prov. vi. 10. The man lies in the bed of sloth, and would not miss heaven, if wishing and woulding would do it; but if these will not do, he must even want it, for he cannot leave the embrace of his dear ease. Fighting, running, praying, striving, wrestling, taking heaven by violence, and the like, he cannot away with.

3. Because Satan furnishes them with work. John viii. 44. When the call of the gospel comes to sinners, Satan does with them as Pharaoh did with the Israelites, holds them more to their tasks; so they have always busy hands, and hearts full of their works, insomuch that they cannot get the work of religion minded to purpose. And what are they doing? They are busy weaving the spider's web; very busy doing nothing: or hatching the cockatrice's egg; doing worse than nothing. They have much to do, having the desires of the flesh and mind to fulfil. They have more to do than they are able.

III. Why this refusal should be retracted? why they should repent, and aim at compliance with the gospel-call?

1. Because this refusal is against the respect and duty which you owe to him who calls you to the work. "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if I then be a father where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hosts unto you." Mal. i. 6. Have you no regard to the authority of God? or has not he who made you a power over you, to prescribe your work? Will ye follow the dictates of your own corrupt passions, even against the plain dictates of his Spirit? Shall we thus by our obstinacy, affront our heavenly Father, and grieve his Spirit?

2. Because this refusal is full of the basest ingratitude. What is the meaning of all the gospel-calls, but, sinners, do yourselves no harm? Your interests is advanced by working. If thou ply the work of religion, the advantage is thine own; if not, the loss remains alone with yourself. Prov. ix. 12. It is a great favour that thou hast access to the work. Had not the Son of God made way for it through his blood, thou hadst never got such a call.

3. It is the most foolish and unreasonable refusal that can be; and if the sinner were not out of himself, he could not be capable of it. What! will a starving man refuse to have meat when it is offered him? or will a convict refuse liberty? But this ye do in refusing Christ's call, and so judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life. This folly and madness will be bitterness in the end.

Lastly. You are ruined if you stand to your refusal. That obstinacy will bar you out of heaven and the favour of God for ever. Heaven is a rest prepared, not for loiterers, but for labourers; and you that will have your ease now, must bid farewell to it forever in another world. Prov. i. 24. Salvation work will not work, unless men bestir themselves; but damnation work will go on when men sit at ease, and are carried down the stream into the ocean of the wrath of God.

1. Repent now, and fall to that work ye have formerly refused; for it is a work preferable to all other works. The work of religion is

your main, your chief work.—(1.) It is the most pleasant work. Many are disgusted at the work of religion, because they think it is unpleasant; but they have not yet tried it, and, therefore, are not fit judges. You have a more favourable account of it from Prov. iii. 17. “Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.” See also Ps. iv. 7, 8. “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.” There is work indeed in the vineyard that is unpleasant to corrupt nature; but even out of this arises the most refined satisfaction to the new nature. And what are all the pleasures of this world to reconciliation with God, and that peace of conscience and joy that there is in believing?—(2.) It is the most profitable work. The profit hereof is both for time and for eternity, “For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” 1 Tim. iv. 8. The profits of it are durable profits; they last, and will be profitable, when all others will be of no avail. Hereby you will gain the life of your souls, and, as the loss is incomparably great, so also is the gain of it.—(3.) It is the most necessary work. It is the one thing needful, absolutely needful. Luke x. 42. We cannot be happy here or hereafter without it; without it we are undone for ever.

2. The time is coming when working in the vineyard will be over; and if you continue to refuse, ye know not if ever you will get another offer; “for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.” This day’s delay may be an eternal loss, for you may be in eternity before another day. A new refusal is dangerous; God may take you at your word.

3. Our Lord is content yet to invite you to his work, notwithstanding your former refusals; you will still be accepted: “Him that cometh unto me,” says Jesus, “I will in no wise cast out.” John vi. 37.

4. Whatever hardships may be in the work of religion, it is not long ere you shall be freed from them all; you shall be made more than conquerors: “You shall rest from your labours, and your works shall follow you.”

Lastly. If you will not, then remember death will make you change your mind; and you will get a long eternity to repent that you did not repent in time. But such a change can then be of no avail but to increase your misery. Infinitely better, then, will it be for you, if this change takes place at present: for now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation.” 2 Cor. vi. 2.

JOY IN CHRIST.

Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.—Ps. cxlix. 2.

It appears somewhat strange, that a religion coming from heaven, and purporting to make men happy, should be almost universally considered as a source of melancholy, and as destructive of all personal and social

comfort. But it may be easily accounted for : religion calls men from the pleasures of sin, and promises them sublimer pleasures in its stead. But unregenerate men, knowing nothing of spiritual joy, have no idea that any such thing exists : whereas, the joys which they are to sacrifice, have afforded them many a delicious feast. Hence, till through faith in the divine records, they feel the bitterness of sin, or taste the felicity of God's chosen, they will and must suppose, that they are called to relinquish what is substantial, and to grasp a shadow. But the saints of old have invariably attested that religion's ways are ways of pleasantness and peace ; and David, who was no incompetent judge of this matter, exhorts every subject of the Redeemer's kingdom to rejoice in Zion's king. We shall,

Explain his exhortation.

1. Who are the children of Zion?

Not every man by nature, seeing we are "children of wrath;" not any man by education, since it is beyond the power of man to convey to others such principles and dispositions as are necessary to bring them into that near relation to the church of God. We must be born from above, through the influence of God's word and Spirit : and till a supernatural change has been wrought on all the faculties of our souls by God himself, whatever we may profess to be, we are, beyond a doubt, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

2. Who is their King?

It is to Christ alone that this name belongs. He is, indeed, the King of all the earth, and has the whole creation under his control. But, in this sense, many are his subjects who despise his person and hate his government : whereas, over Zion he reigns by the most cordial consent of all his people, there not being so much as one who does not know him, love him, serve him, and desire the very thoughts of his heart to be subjected to his law. On the other hand, he affords them his protection, supplies their wants, and makes them victorious over all their enemies.

3. What is their duty towards him?

It is not sufficient that they yield obedience to his will, as slaves to a tyrant whom they fear : they must love his person, delight in his commands, be zealous for his glory, and rely humbly on his care : in a word, they must rejoice in him. This is essential to the Christian character : and if we attain not to this spirit, we are more inexcusable than the Jews, and obnoxious to a heavier doom. We say not, indeed, that the children of Zion are never to mourn : for mourning is both introductory to joy, and consistent with it ; yea, it is even a very necessary ingredient of that joy which we ought to feel in the contemplation of Christ's character and offices ; and the more fervently we love him, the more deeply shall we lament that our love and joy are so disproportioned to his worth.

4. The object in whom we are to rejoice.

This is none other than our adorable Immanuel, who combines in himself all the perfections of the Godhead, and all the excellences of the most spotless manhood. Moreover the love he has manifested towards his subjects, is such as infinitely surpasses our highest concep-

tions : he assumed our nature, and died for us, while we were in actual rebellion against him. And what a delightful sway does he exercise over them ! So light and easy is his yoke, that there is not one of his laws, no not one, which may not be summed up in this, "Be happy." What rewards, too, does he bestow, not on a few favourites only, but on all his subjects ! There is not one of them whom he does not make a king like unto himself, and place upon a throne like unto that on which he himself is seated at the right hand of God. Shall we refuse to rejoice in such a King as this ?

5. To those who are going on their way rejoicing.

Take care that you make Christ, and not your own frames or feelings, the object and ground of your joy. And guard against pride, self-confidence, and sin of whatever kind, knowing that such things will vitiate and destroy all the happiness of the soul. David's advice must ever be attended to : "Rejoice with trembling." Ps. ii. 11.

THE EXALTED PRIVILEGE OF ALL TRUE BELIEVERS.

All are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

THE Jews gloried in Moses so as to despise Jesus Christ. John ix. 28, 29. The church at Corinth began to glory in their ministers, so as to dishonour God, verses 1—4. Paul reproves them, and shows that the greatest of all are but ministers, verses 4—7. Then draws this inference : "Therefore, let no man glory in men," &c. ver. 21.

I. Christ is God's.

Jesus Christ is spoken of in a twofold point of view.

1. As God. John i. 1. Phil. ii. 6.

2. As man. In this point of view, "Christ is God's." And, 1. Christ, as man, is God's creature. Heb. x. 5.—2. God's servant. Isa. xlii. 1.

3. God's anointed servant. Isa. lxi. 1. Priest. Heb. xii. 17. Prophet. Acts iii. 22. King. Zech. ix. 9. Isa. xxxii. 1. God's Son. Matt. iii. 17. Beloved Son, obedient Son, obedient to death the death of the cross. Phil. ii. 8. "Christ is God's."

II. Believers are Christ's. "Ye are Christ's,"

1. By creation. John i. 3.

2. By purchase. Acts xx. 28.

3. By conquest. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

4. By possession. 1 Cor. vi. 19. Eph. iii. 17.

5. By marriage union. Hos. ii. 19, 20.

6. By adoption. 1 John iii. 1.

And lastly, they are Christ's by self-dedication. Rom. xii. 1. Isa. xlv.

5. "Believers are Christ's."

III. All things are the believer's.—"All are yours."

Ministers, 1 Cor. iii. 22. Their various abilities, natural and acquired ; sons of thunder, and sons of consolation ; their studies, their experience,

their temptations, prayers, consolations, &c. are for their instruction and edification. "The world," *i. e.* as much as is for their real good. Matt. vi. 33. 1 Tim. iv. 8. "Or life." Life is the believer's, as he alone can properly enjoy life. "Or death." Death opens to the believer the gate of heaven. Ps. xxiii. 4. 1 Cor. xv. 55. Hos. xiii. 14. "Or things present, or things to come;" be they adverse or prosperous, painful or pleasing. Rom. viii. 28. "All are yours." God is theirs; his perfections are theirs; his wisdom is their counsellor, his omnipotence their support, his omnipresence their companion, his unchangeableness the rock of their security, his eternity the date of their happiness, &c; his promises, his providences, creatures, &c. "all are yours." Rev. xx. 7.

Inference :

1. What a contrast between the believer and the men of the world ! Rev. iii. 18.

2. Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith. 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

LOOKING TO CHRIST

INSEPARABLY CONNECTED WITH SALVATION.

Look unto me, and be ye saved, &c.—Isa. xlv. 22.

"By grace ye are saved." Eph. ii. 8. Now that faith, which is the instrumental cause of our salvation, is spoken of in the sacred scriptures, by various metaphorical expressions; sometimes it is borrowed from earthly things, and particularly from the actions of the body. Matt. xi. 28. Isa. lv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17. Or, as the manslayer, being closely pursued, &c. Heb. vi. 18. Sometimes from the conduct of a dutiful and loyal people towards their royal sovereign, upon his entering among them in his own territories. John i. 11, 12. Sometimes the metaphor is taken from the ear; and faith is expressed by hearing his voice, as an impoverished, dying wretch would hear of plenty and life. Isa. lv. 3. And sometimes the metaphor is taken from the eye, as in the text, and faith is represented as looking to Christ.

I. Explain the duty here expressed by the metaphor of looking.

We are to observe in general, that a man's looks often indicate his condition and frame of mind. By virtue of that strange union between the soul and the body, the dispositions of the one are often discovered by the emotion and appearance of the other. The eye, in particular, is a mirror, in which we may see the various passions of the mind; and is a kind of silent, yet significant language, that conveys to others those inward exercises which the tongue does not, or perhaps cannot express: hence we can understand a look of sorrow and compassion, a look of joy, and the look of a perishing suppliant. If an agonizing patient casts an eager look upon his physician, he understands it to be a silent petition for relief. When a dying husband fixes a wishful, tender look upon his surviving half, and those other selves, his children, they know the melting language, and feel its resistless energy; and when a drowning

man casts a wild and eager look towards a boat coming to his relief, we understand it to be the language of earnest importunity for speedy help.

Hence it follows that looking to Christ implies those suitable dispositions and exercises of heart towards him, which are expressed by the earnest and significant looks of persons in a distressed condition towards their deliverer.

And, in such a case, it is natural to conceive a person expressing, by his looks, a particular and distinct knowledge of his deliverer, an importunate cry for his assistance, a wishful expectation of it, an humble dependence on him for it, an universal submission to him, a hearty love and approbation of him, a joy and gratitude for his deliverance.

And these dispositions and exercises of mind towards Christ, I presume, are intended in the text by looking to him.

1. Looking to Christ implies a particular notice and distinct knowledge of him. John xvii. 3. Isa. liii. 11 ; xxvii. 11. Hosea iv. 6. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

2. Looking to Christ implies an importunate eagerness for relief from him. Ps. xxv. 15. As a child falling into the hands of a murderer, on the sight of a parent coming to its help, so are we desired to look to Christ : this implies a sense of our need of him. Ps. cxxi. 1. Jonah ii. 4. John iii. 14, 15.

3. Looking to Christ implies a wishful expectation of deliverance from him, Isa. xvii. 7. Ps. cxxx. 6. Acts iii. 4, 5. Matt. xv. 22, 28.

4. Looking to Christ implies an humble dependence upon him for salvation. This supposes a deep sense of our own utter inability ; then we see no ground for self-confidence, when we shall place our trust in Christ alone. 2 Chron. xx. 12. Mic. vii. 7. Job xiii. 15.

5. Looking to Christ means an universal, cheerful submission to his authority. Ps. cxxiii. 1, 2.

6. Looking to Christ implies our hearty approbation of him as a Saviour. Love is often expressed by a look. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

7. Looking to Christ implies joy and gratitude. Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

II. Urge the duty by several weighty considerations.

It is the duty of saints and sinners, in all ages and places, to the end of the world ; and the arguments to enforce it can never be exhausted : those in this copious text are sufficient.

1. It is salvation that is offered. "Look and be saved."

2. This salvation may be obtained upon low terms : it may be obtained by a look. "Look, and be saved."

3. It is Immanuel, our incarnate God, that invites and commands us to look to him and be saved. We may trifle with the commands of an usurper, and reject the treacherous invitations of an enemy ; but dare we trifle with the injunctions, dare we refuse the gracious invitations of our supreme Lord and heavenly King ? Rom. xiv. 9, 11. Phil. ii. 9, 11.

4. It is Immanuel we are to look unto. "Look unto me." He is the glorious, attractive object we are called to behold. And looking will not be in vain ; for,

5. He is able to save us, upon our looking to him. "Look unto me, and be saved, for I am God." And who can give us greater security of salvation ? "If God be for us, who can be against us ?" Rom. viii. 31.

6, Look unto him, for he is God, and there is none else. This implies that there is salvation in no other. Job v. 1.

And, lastly, we must look unto him, or drop into hell. Look to him; for we are particularly invited, being especially meant by the "ends of the earth." Therefore, "look unto him, and be saved, all ye ends of the earth;" more especially backsliders, sensible sinners, &c.

LOVE TO GOD AND OUR BRETHREN,

THE COMMAND OF CHRIST.

And this command have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.—1 John iv. 21.

LOVE is so essential to religion, that whatever we do, know, or suffer, if we have not love, we are nothing. Love is the first and great commandment, the fulfilling of the law, &c. Religion without love is as absurd as friendship without love. It is not only our duty and privilege to love God, but also the brethren: and this is both a sign and consequence of our loving God. "We know that we have passed from death to life." John xv. 12—17. The believer hath a two-fold love: a love of civility to all; and a love of complacency to those of the household of faith. "This commandment," &c.

I. Believers must love one another.

1. Our love to the people of God must be sincere. 1 John iii. 18. Rom. xii. 9. Many are like Naphtali. Gen. xlix. 21. Pretended love is like painted fire.

2. Love to the saints must be spiritual. We must love them, not because they are affable and kind, but because they are saints. 1 John v. 1, 2. 1 Pet. i. 22.

3. Our love to the brethren must be extensive and universal. We must love all, of every denomination, who love our Lord Jesus, though they have many infirmities; 1 Cor. xiii. 4; Eph. iv. 32; though they may differ from us in little things. We must love them universally, whether they be rich or poor, of our own nation, or strangers. Col. i. 4. 1 Pet. ii. 17. We must love them, though they are more holy or useful than we are.

4. Our love to the people of God must be fervent. "They are the excellent ones of the earth." 1 Pet. i. 22. Ps. xv. 4.

5. Our love to God's children must be social. We should prefer their company, and delight in it. Ps. cxix. 63. For a believer and an unbeliever to associate together, is like the living keeping company with the dead; and we read only of two, who, when living, desired to keep company with the dead, and they were possessed with the devil. Matt. viii. 28.

6. Our love to God's people must be demonstrative. Be ready to do all kind offices for them. 1 John iii. 18, 19. James ii. 15, 16. We should be like the good Samaritan. Luke x. 34.

And, lastly, our love to the saints should be constant. In adversity

and prosperity, in honour or dishonour. Heb. xiii. 13. 1 John iii. 16, 17. Love must be like the pulse, always beating. And if we are partakers of this love, we have good ground to believe our names are enrolled among the living in Jerusalem. Isa. iv. 3.

II. Assign a few reasons why believers ought thus to love one another.

1. They are all stones of the same building, 1 Pet. ii. 5, and they must be cemented by love.

2. They are children of the same family, Eph. iii. 15, and therefore there should be no strife. Gen. xiii. 7, 8. Ps. cxxxiii.

3. They are heirs of the same inheritance. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

4. They are fellow-sufferers : and the voice of the rod is, "Love one another."

5. They are members of the same body. Rom. xii. 5.

Inference :

1. For the saints not to love one another is unnatural. They are Christ's lambs. John xxi. 15.

2. It is dangerous. Gal. v. 15.

3. It is wicked : God has commanded it. 1 John iv. 21.

UNION WITH CHRIST

CONNECTED WITH REGENERATION.

Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.—2 Cor. v. 17.

IN the text we have a question proposed, "If any man be in Christ?" A rule by which it may be determined, viz. "He is a new creature." This general rule more particularly explained, "Old things are passed away, and all things are become new." Eph. iv. 20—24.

I. Why is the regenerating work of the Spirit called a new creation? Doubtless, on account of the similitude between it and the old creation.

1. In the beginning the earth was without form, and void; *i. e.* out of order and in confusion : and darkness was upon the face of the deep. Gen. i. 2. What a striking emblem of the state of the unregenerate ! Isa. lx. 2. Eph. v. 8.

2. It was the Spirit of God, moving upon the face of the waters, that gave being to the natural world. Gen. i. 2. Likewise in this new creation. John iii. 6—8.

3. The first thing God created in the natural world was light ; Gen. i. 3 ; so also in the spiritual. 2 Cor. vi. 6. Col. iii. 10.

4. The word of God was the instrument of the first creation ; Ps. xxxiii. 6—9 ; so also in the new creation, or work of grace on the soul. 1 Pet. i. 23. James i. 18.

5. The same power that created still supports the world ; Heb. i. 3 ; so this new creation. 1 Pet. i. 5. Jude, verse 1.

And lastly. God surveyed the first creation with complacency and delight ; Gen. i. 31 ; so also the second creation. Nothing is more pleasing to God than beholding the work of grace prosper in the soul. 1 Thess. v. 16—18.

II. Inquire in what respects the souls who are in Christ are renewed, or made new creatures.

1. In their state and condition. "They are passed from death unto life." 1 John iii. 14. They were condemned by the law, they are now justified by grace. They were under the curse of the old covenant; they are now under the blessing of the new. They were once afar off, but now they are brought nigh unto God. Aliens and strangers; now of the household of God. Eph. ii. 12, 13. Rom. viii. 1.

2. In their frame and constitution. All the faculties and affections of their souls are renewed by grace. The understanding was dark, now light in the Lord. Eph. v. 8. The conscience was stained with guilt, and full of horror; but is now purged, and filled with peace. Heb. x. 22. The will rebellious and stubborn, but now obedient to the will of God. Ps. cx. 3. Their desires went out in pursuit of vanities, but now they centre in God. Isa. xxvi. 8, 9. Their affections were placed on earthly objects, but now on the Supreme Excellence. Ps. lxxxiii. 25. Their joy was once in trifles, but now in Christ. Phil. iii. 3. Their hopes and expectations were once from this world, but now from that to come. Heb. vi. 19.

3. All who are in Christ are renewed in their practice and conversation. Eph. ii. 1—3, 10. 1 Cor. vii 11. 1 Pet. iv. 4.

III. The necessity of being created anew in Christ.

1. It is the express will of God. John iii. 5. Heb. xii. 14. Gal. v. 6; vi. 15.

2. This new creation is a part of the salvation we have to expect through Christ, and is our qualification for heaven. Col. i. 12. 1 John iii. 2.

3. None but these are in Christ. 2 Cor. v. 17.

And lastly. The encouragement for the sensible sinner. Rev. xxi. 5.

THE BELIEVER'S GROANS,

WHILE IN THE TABERNACLE OF THE BODY.

For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.—2 Cor. v. 4.

IN the first verse of this chapter, the apostle gives a reason why he and others of the saints in his day did endure persecution for the cause of Christ, with such unshaken constancy and holy magnanimity. "For we know," &c. When we can say with the Psalmist, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," we shall be ready to join issue with him, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Ps. xxiii. 4, 6.

I. The believer's present lodging, a tabernacle.

It is called a house, ver. 1; and it is properly so called because of its curious structure and workmanship. Ps. cxxxix. 14, 15. The body is a wonderful piece of architecture, wherein the wisdom and power of the Creator are displayed; yet it is but a house of earth.

1. In respect of its original. All the four elements meet in it, but earth is the predominant. Job iv. 19.

2. In respect of the means that support it ; for the corn, and wine, and oil with which it is supported, all spring out of the earth.

3. With respect to its end. Gen. iii. 19. Perhaps, with an allusion to this, the prophet cries, Jer. xxii. 29.

4. The believer's present lodging is but a tabernacle, ver. 1. Now a tabernacle or tent is a moveable lodging, and is peculiar to two sorts of persons. To travellers or wayfaring men, especially in the eastern countries. Heb. xi. 9, 13. Ps. cxix. 19. To soldiers or wayfaring men, who are obliged often to move their camp. Believers, whilst in the body, have to act the part of the soldiers, and fight their way to the promised land. Eph. vi. 12.

And lastly, the believer's present lodging is but a crazy house, and must shortly be taken down. "It is to be dissolved." Ps. lxxxix. 48. The Lord designs to raise it up at the resurrection. Job xix. 25, 26.

II. Speak a little of the believer's burdens.

1. The clay tenement itself is often a very heavy burden to him ; when the soul would mount up, as on an eagle's wings, the body weighs it down.

2. The temptations of Satan. 1 Pet. i. 6.

3. The company of the wicked. Ps. cxx. 5, 6. The believer is of Jacob's disposition. Gen. xlix. 6. The wickedness of the wicked weighs down his spirit. Ps. cxix. 136, 158. Ezek. ix. 4.

4. With crosses and afflictions. "Deep calleth unto deep." Ps. xlii. 7.

III. The believer groans.

The working of the believer's heart vents itself various ways.

It is said to be in heaviness. 1 Pet. i. 6.

To cry, Psalm cxxx. 1.

To roar. Job iii. 24.

At the very point of fainting. Ps. xxvii. 13.

He is said to be distracted. Ps. lxxxviii. 15. And the apostle expresses it here by groanings.

There are three sorts of groans :

There are groans of nature. Rom. viii. 22. Man, by his sin, brought a curse on the creation. Gen. iii. 17.

Groans of reason. Ex. vi. 5.

Groans of grace. Rom. viii. 26. And of this kind are the groans the apostle speaks of in the text. This may apply,

1st. To grief and sorrow on account of sin. Job vii. 11.

2nd. To a breathing and panting after a better state, verse 1.

IV. A few remarks.

1. What a vast difference between heaven and earth, between the present lodging of the believer and the heavenly mansions ! This world is a weary land, but there is no weariness in heaven. "They shall serve him day and night in his temple." Rev. vii. 15. This world is a land of distance ; but in heaven the believer will be at home. This world is a den of lions and a mountain of leopards ; but they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain. In this world there are briars and thorns, there nothing but peace and rest. Death, then, ought not to be a terror to the believer.

2. How ought those persons to be pitied who take so much pains to

deck their bodies, and consider themselves at home, and neglect salvation! These know little of the groans in the text. But the time is coming when these shall groan. Isa. lxxv. 13, 14.

3. What a consolation to believers to consider that the Lord is touched with a feeling of their infirmities! Heb. iv. 15. Isa. lxxiii. 9. Ps. ciii. 13.

A SIGHT OF CHRIST,

THE NOBLEST SOURCE OF JOY.

Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.—John xx. 20.

IN the preceding chapter we find our Lord in the field of battle, engaged by the powers of darkness; attacked by them, and vigorously attacking them. Victory, for some time, seemed to hover betwixt the combatants, and at length to incline to the enemies' side, and our champion falls before them! Thus the Lord seemed to deliver his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemies' hand. But the sabbath is over, and the first day of the week begins to dawn, which is like the first day of a new world. In the former chapter we are called to follow our Lord to the cross and grave; but, in this, to attend him on his way to the crown. In one, to be present at his death, and assist at his funeral; in the other, to "come and see the place where the Lord lay."

In this chapter we have the most certain proofs of our Lord's resurrection. The empty grave, his appearance and manifestation to Mary Magdalene, to his disciples, &c. In the text we have the fruit and effect of the discovery: "then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."

Consider,

I. The believer's privilege. "They saw the Lord."

There are several agreements betwixt natural sight and faith's discovery of Christ.

1. The eye is an organ that communicates nothing to the object, but only receives the image of it. So faith in Christ is not a given, but a receiving Christ. John i. 12. By faith we receive Christ, in all his offices, with all his benefits, &c.

2. Natural sight is a confirming evidence, and produces the greatest certainty of the existence and qualities of its object; so faith is a grace that carries certainty in its nature, John vi. 69; Heb. xi. 13; Col. ii. 2, assurance, full assurance, full assurance of understanding, riches of the full assurance of understanding.

3. Natural sight reaches to a great distance, it discerns things afar off; so faith is a grace that sees at a great distance. John viii. 56. Rev. xx. 12.

4. In natural sight, the object is brought near to the eye; so faith brings near its object to the soul. Hence it is called, Heb. xi. 1. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

5. In natural sight there is a medium, to render the object conspicu-

ous ; the sharpest sight cannot see in the dark ; so Christ is only seen by the light of the Holy Ghost. 1 John v. 20.

6. Natural sight serves for direction ; so faith, Heb. xii. 1, 2. Phil. iii. 14.

7. Natural sight is a very comfortable thing ; Eccel. xi. 7 ; so faith, 1 Pet. i. 8. Mal. iv. 2.

8. The eye is a tender organ, the least mote will disturb the eye ; so faith is a tender grace, the least dust of sin will disturb it. Hence we are exhorted, 1 Tim. i. 19 ; and iii. 9.

And lastly, sight is a very piercing sense ; so faith, Rom. iv. 18.

II. The believer's frame, the fruit of this privilege : " Then were the disciples glad."

Which implies,

1. High thoughts of the Lord. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

2. The soul's complacency in him. The Lord delights in believers, and they delight in him. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

3. The soul's resting in the Lord. Isa. xxx. 15. Jer. vi. 16.

4. This joy includes in it enlargement of soul. A person under the fetters of guilt and ignorance has no joy but when they are knocked off. Isa. xxxv. 6. Ps. cxix. 32 ; xxx. 11.

5. An elevation of soul after the Lord. Ps. xxv. 1. Rev. xii. 1.

6. A holy boasting in the Lord. Ps. xxxiv. 1, 2. Phil. iii. 3. Ps. xliv. 8.

And, lastly, it is peculiar joy. 1 John i. 4. John xvi. 13. 1 Sam. xxx. 6. Strangers intermeddle not with this joy. Isa. lxxv. 13, 14.

III. Inquire whence it is that the sight of Christ gladdens the disciples.

1. This proceeds from the nearness of the object. Matt. xxviii. 20. Rom. viii. 35—38.

2. The suitableness of the object. 1 Cor. i. 30. Isa. lv. 2, and lxvi. 11. Ex. xxxiv. 6. John xi. 25.

3. The amiableness of the object. Cant. v. 10—16.

4. The preciousness of the object. Phil. iii. 7, 8. 1 Pet. ii. 7.

And, lastly, this joy arises from a sense of the fulness, perpetuity of, and property in the object. Col. i. 19. Heb. xiii. 8. John xvii. 21.

Inferences :

1. Religion is no melancholy employment. John xx. 21. Prov. iii. 17.

2. What blessings are gospel-ordinances ! Ps. lxxxiv. 1 ; xlii. 1, 2 ; cxxii. 1.

3. No wonder believers despise the dreggy delights of the world. Neh. viii. 10. Gal. vi. 14.

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST,

THE OBJECT OF THE CHRISTIAN'S BOAST.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, &c.—Rom. i. 16.

SHAME is a discouraging passion of the mind ; shame sinks our spirits ; shame enfeebles all the active powers. It was necessary, therefore, that

St. Paul, who had to preach the gospel among the Jews, to whom it was a stumbling-block, and among the Greeks, to whom it was foolishness, should be delivered from this shame, and endued with sacred courage. "I am not ashamed," &c. This is an age wherein the gospel of our Redeemer meets with much contempt and opposition. Many there are who endeavour to find blemishes and defects in this gospel. The blessed word of God, that reveals this grace to us, meets with mockery and profane reproach from deists and unbelievers. Those, therefore, who believe this gospel from the heart, have need of courage to maintain their profession of it. Let us, therefore, meditate upon this sacred text, that each may pronounce boldly, "I am not ashamed," &c.

I. What the gospel of Christ implies.

1. The gospel of Christ is good news, or glad tidings. It is glad tidings of great joy to all people. Tidings of eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the sick, strength to the weak, liberty to the captive, life to the dead, salvation to the lost, &c. Luke iv. 18, 19.

2. This gospel has gone through various editions. To Adam, after the fall. Gen. iii. 15. To Abraham. Gen. xxii. 17. By the prophets, by Christ, &c. Heb. ii. 3. The gospel in its various editions, goes on this supposition, that man is in a fallen state; otherwise, it would insult us to offer pardon if we are not guilty, liberty if we are not tied and bound, holiness and not impure, &c.

3. Taking it for granted man is a fallen creature, how well suited are those blessings exhibited in the gospel to our condition! Isa. lv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17.

II. What is implied in this expression, "I am not ashamed."

1. That he was not ashamed to believe it as a man. His natural powers gave him no secret reproof: his understanding did not reprove and shake his faith: his own reason approved it, and justified him in the belief of it. He believed it so firmly, as to venture his eternal concerns on it; his soul rested here, and he was not ashamed of his resting-place.

2. To profess it as a Christian. He was ready to tell the world that he believed it. He was going to profess this gospel at Rome, and tells them he was not ashamed of it.

3. To preach it as a minister. Acts xxvi. 26, 27.

4. To contend for it as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Phil. i. 7.

And lastly. He was not ashamed to suffer and die for it as a martyr. Load me with reproaches, ye Jews, my countrymen; load me with chains, ye magistrates at Rome: "I am not ashamed." Acts xx. 24; xxi. 13.

Observe. More is implied in the text than expressed: "I am not ashamed;" *i. e.* I glory, make my boast of it. Phil. iii. 4. Eph. iii. 8. Gal. vi. 14.

III. The reasons why the apostle was not ashamed: "It is the power of God unto salvation."

1. This gospel is the power of God to awaken. Acts ii. 37.

2. To justify. 1 Thess. i. 5.

3. To purify. John xvii. 17.

4. The power of God to eternal salvation. Jude, ver. 21. 1 Pet. i. 5.

5. "To every one that believeth." No believer excluded from salvation: none excluded from believing. John iii. 16. "To the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Rom. x. 11—13.

Inferences:

1. What an affront to the Majesty of heaven, and a reproach to ourselves, should we be ashamed of this gospel! Mark viii. 38.

2. If this be a gospel not to be ashamed of, then study it well. Let us furnish ourselves with arguments daily, that we may believe it without shame, and profess it without a blush.

3. So far from being ashamed of this gospel, let it be our glory and boast.

THE RICHES OF DIVINE GRACE EXEMPLIFIED.

That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace.
Eph. ii. 7.

In these words we have the conclusion of the longest continued sentence, perhaps, in all the book of God; viz. from the 18th verse of the preceding chapter to this. It began with the "riches of glory," and it ends with the "riches of grace." It contains a parallel between what was done in Christ the head, and in us his members; that so in Christ's glory, as in a lively pattern already perfected, we might see what God had done, and will do for us, to the praise of his rich grace and glorious power. For this is the great and ultimate end of all, as is plain from the text, "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace."

I. Speak of God's kindness to men in Christ.

1. This appears in the assumption of our nature to a personal union with himself. Ps. lxxxix. 19. Heb. ii. 16. John i. 14.

2. In his tasting death in that nature. Heb. ii. 9.

3. In the resurrection of that nature from the dead. Rom. vi. 9. Matt. xxviii. 6. 1 Pet. i. 21. Acts xiii. 32, 33.

4. In giving it a glorious ascension into heaven. Ps. lxviii. 17, 18. Heb. xiii. 20. 1 Pet. i. 3.

5. In his intercession for transgressors. Heb. vii. 25. 1 John ii. 1.

6. In bringing that nature into the full enjoyment of blessedness. Ps. xxi. 4—6.

Some instances of God's kindness to believers, in and through Christ. It is manifest in,

1. The remission of their sins. Eph. i. 7.

2. The gift of the Spirit. Rom. viii. 16. Titus iii. 5, 6.

3. Union with his person. John xvii. 21. Isa. liv. 5.

4. His bringing them into covenant relation with himself, as their God. Gen. xvii. 7. Ps. cxliv. 15.

5. Justification of their persons. Acts xiii. 38, 39. Ps. xxxii. 1.

6. In his adopting them into his family. 1. John iii. 1. Rom. viii. 17.

7. In the regeneration of their nature. 1 Pet. i. 3. Titus iii. 5.

8. In giving them victory over death. Hos. xiii. 14. Ps. xxiii. 4. 1 Cor. xv. 55.

And, lastly, in their resurrection and glorification. Rom. viii. 11. John xvii. 24.

II. The objects of this kindness.

1. Creatures, frail creatures, Isa. xl. 6, worms, Job xxv. 6; xvii. 14, poor nothings, Isa. xl. 17.

2. As Sinners. Impotent creatures, Rom. v. 6, impoverished, Rev. iii. 17, dead, Eph. ii. 1, enemies, Col. i. 21. They are rather devils than men. John viii. 44.

III. In what respects this kindness of God is through Christ Jesus.

1. It is through Christ Jesus as he is the meritorious cause of all our blessings. Col. i. 20.

2. His kindness is through Christ Jesus, in regard that all God's kindness to us flows from his kindness to him: John xvii. 26; and "we are accepted in the beloved." Eph. i. 6.

3. Given to us through Christ. Rom. vi. 23.

4. As they are dispensed by Christ. Acts v. 31.

5. As Christ comprehends all God's kindnesses. Col. iii. 11. John iv. 10. Prov. viii. 35.

IV. The reasons.

1. Because "God is love." 1 John iv. 8. John iii. 16.

2. That God might show the exceeding riches of his kindness to man. Titus iii. 4, 5. Eph. ii. 7.

And, lastly, for his own glory. Isa. xlviii. 11. Ps. cvi. 8.

Inferences:

1. There is no cause of boasting in ourselves.

2. Meditate frequently on God's kindness. Isa. lxiii. 7. Ps. viii. 4. xxxvi. 7. Job. vii. 17.

3. Prize that gospel which reveals to us so much kindness.

4. Believe it. Mark xvi. 16.

THE SECURITY OF TRUE CHRISTIANS,

THE THEME OF THEIR CONSTANT EXULTATION.

Let the wilderness, and the cities thereof, lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains.—Isa. xlii. 11.

THE preceding verses exhibit a clear prophecy of the Messiah, in the person, character, and office of Cyrus. Behold, he cometh with infinite meekness, and invested with omnipotent power, for the arduous enterprise of our salvation. He wrought wonderful miracles, to show that he was the Messiah. Verses 1—11. By the top of the mountains, &c. we may understand that part of Arabia which is called Petrea; *i. e.* rocky: not only gentiles, but the rudest and most barbarous race of men.

The greatest scope of all the sacred scriptures is Christ the Saviour: as all the winding streams of a river lead to the fountain, so all divine

revelation obviously points to the Redeemer. By the rock, therefore, understand, (at least by way of accommodation,) the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. x. 4. *Psa.* xviii. 46.

I. In what respects Jesus Christ may be considered as a rock.

1. In regard of his omnipotent power. Rocks have an amazing power to resist all opposing violence; Jesus Christ hath infinitely more. "Before him the mountains skip." *Ps.* cxiv. 4. *Job.* xxvi. 14. *Matt.* xxviii. 18. He overcame all the enemies of our salvation. "Travelling in the greatness of his strength, he went from conquering to conquer, till he bowed his head, and it was finished." This rock was smitten for us; *Isa.* liii. 5; in the clefts thereof we may find a secure retreat.

2. In regard to his splendour and ineffable greatness. Rocks may lie low and deep; but they rise high, their lofty heads divide the clouds; so Christ, when veiled in our flesh. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Yet, even then, his glory shone forth; *John* i. 14; now he hath ascended. *Psa.* lxviii. 18.

3. In regard to his fulness, and the unchangeable nature of his perfections. Those storms and tempests, that spread dessolation, and bury islands, remove not the rocks out of their place. Jesus Christ unchangeable. *Heb.* xiii. 8. Rocks shall wax old. *Heb.* i. 10, 11. 2 Cor. i. 20. Let all our dependence be on him. *Matt.* vii. 24, 25.

4. In regard to his majesty and beauty. Rocks have a natural grandeur, that art can never equal. There is a transcendent majesty and beauty in the Son of God. *Ps.* xciii. 1; *civ.* 1. Jude, ver. 25. *Cant.* v. 10. Christ is the beloved of his Father, the delight of his people.

II. How believers are the inhabitants of this rock.

1. It is the place of their nativity. They are born from above. *Eph.* ii. 4, 5—10.

2. Their dwelling-place. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations," *Ps.* xc. 1, saith the church of old; and 1 *John* iii. 24. There is a reciprocal union between Christ and believers; they dwell in him, and he in them. *Eph.* iii. 17.

3. As they may be said to dwell on high. *Isa.* xl. 31. *Phil.* iii. 20. What is said of the Kenites, is true of every believer. *Num.* xxiv. 21. *Rev.* xii. 1.

4. As they receive all their supplies from this rock; *Phil.* iv. 19; as a person in a strange land receives his supplies from home, or as the waters in the wilderness supplied Israel of old.

And, lastly, as they are to abide there for ever. *Rom.* viii. 35; *John* x. 28.

III. The subject matter of their song.

Redeeming love is the subject matter thereof; it can never be exhausted. More particularly,

1. It is a new song, proceeding from a new nature, animated by new mercies. *Ps.* cxliv. 9. *Rev.* v. 9. A new song, suited to the new covenant. *Jer.* xxxii. 39, 40.

2. A spiritual song. Exceeds all carnal mirth. *Rom.* v. 11. *Isa.* xii. 1. *Ps.* ciii. 1.

3. Of distinction. None but those who are taught of God can sing this song. *Rev.* xiv. 3.

4. On a sacrifice. 1 Cor. v. 7.

5. Of victory. Rev. xv. 2, 3.

And, lastly, it is an everlasting song. Isaiah xxxv. 10.

Inferences :

1. The Lord, by setting forth Christ as a rock, magnifies his great power, and shows that he is the power as well as the wisdom of God, above his enemies. Deut. xxxii. 31.

2. The folly of those who depend on any thing besides Christ. Isa. xxviii. 17; Matt. vii. 26, 27.

3. The madness of those who oppose him; it is as the waves dashing against a rock. Ps. ii. 5, 9.

THE BELIEVER REJOICING

IN HIS PRESENT AND FUTURE FELICITY.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God.—1 John iii. 2.

OUR Lord was hated, reviled, and persecuted unto death; but see how glorious was his person, and how exalted his character. In the same manner, his followers are treated with contempt; but God declares their state to be the most honourable on earth. To this effect St. John represents them as slighted by man, and honoured by God.

I. The present state of believers, "sons of God."

1. By adoption.

All believers were once children of wrath; Eph. ii. 3; but now of the household of God. Eph. ii. 19. Gal. iv. 4, 5.

2. By regeneration.

Once they had only a carnal mind; Rom. viii. 7; but they have been born again of the Spirit. John i. 13. 1 Pet. i. 23. Eph. ii. 10. John iii. 7.

3. They who are the sons of God are admitted to enjoy the privileges of sons; and this is implied in their title. Liberty of access to their heavenly Father. Rom. viii. 14, 15. Heb. x. 22. 2 Cor. iii. 17. Petitions graciously heard and answered. Matt. vii. 7—11. Luke xi. 11—13. John xiv. 13, 14; xvi. 24. Again, the sons of God are entitled to the protection and compassion of their heavenly Father: his guardian care is celebrated, Ps. xci. and cxxi; and his tender compassion, Ps. cxli. 13. Isa. lxiii. 9. Seasonable correction, Ps. lxxxix. 30—34. Heb. xii. 5—11. Ps. cxix. 67, 68, and verse 71.

4. The sons of God are heirs of the heavenly inheritance, and their relation implies a title to it. Rom. viii. 17. Gal. iv. 7. They are born to a crown, begotten to an inheritance: 1 Pet. i. 3, 4: and how vast their inheritance is, learn from Rev. xxi. 7. 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22. No wonder the apostle should exclaim, 1 John iii. 1.

II. Their future state. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

1. It doth not yet appear what they shall be with respect to the enlargement of their souls. That the human soul is capable of vast enlargements, that its faculties may expand to great dimensions, is evident from childhood to youth; and we may be sure that when, like a bird quit of a cage, it gets loose among its kindred spirits, and flies at large in its proper element, its faculties will be vastly enlarged.

2. With respect to the glorious bodies they will have after the resurrection. Matter is capable of prodigious refinement: the sun is of the same original matter as a clod of earth, differs only in modification. St. Paul says, they will be spiritual bodies, 1 Cor. xv. 44, like to Christ's glorious body, Phil. iii. 21. Matt. xvii. 2; no longer capable of pain, &c. Isa. xxxiii. 24. 1 Cor. xv. 43; no longer feel hunger, &c. Rev. vii. 16.

3. With respect to their employments. We know, from plain declarations of sacred writ, that the contemplation of the divine perfections, &c. will be part of their employ; but we have no reason to suppose that it will consist entirely in contemplation and adoration; but we must wait till the light of eternity break on us to know fully: they shall be completely happy. Our Lord gives us the fullest assurance. John xvii. 24. St. Paul leaves us no room to doubt. 1 Cor. xv. 49.

Inferences :

1. How wonderfully different the lot of believers and unbelievers! Believers are the children of God; unbelievers, children of the wicked one. John viii. 38—44. Believers can form no adequate conception of the happiness that awaits them; unbelievers have no idea of the misery to which they are hastening. For what different ends will their capacities of soul and body be enlarged! Let none defer calling upon God for mercy: let all seek regenerating grace, and an admission into his family. If we believe in Christ, these blessings shall be ours. John i. 12.

2. How bright are the prospects of a true Christian! His warfare shall soon be over; another day may put him in possession of that happiness of which he has now no adequate conception, &c. Let these prospects animate the pious soul; let every one stand ready to take his flight; 2 Pet. iii. 12; let the beloved apostle be our example. Rev. xxii. 20.

THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE.

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.—Acts xvii. 30.

WE here find St. Paul in as learned an assembly as perhaps he ever appeared in: we find him at Athens, a city of Greece, famous all over the world for learning; a city where Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, and the most illustrious philosophers of antiquity lived and taught.

The apostle, instead of amusing them with a learned harangue, or confirming them in their idolatry, boldly, though in a very handsome and genteel manner, exposes their superstitions, calls them from their idols to the worship of the one true God. Having asserted these fundamental articles of natural religion, he introduces the glorious peculiarities of revelation; he preached Jesus to them, as the Saviour and Judge of the world.

In the text he inculcates the great gospel-duty of repentance, as bin-

ding upon all mankind, philosophers and judges, as well as illiterate and vulgar ; in Athens, as well as the most barbarous countries of the earth.

“The times of this ignorance God winked at.” By the “such times,” he means the times previous to the propagation of the gospel in the heathen world ; who, for many ages, were sunk into the most gross ignorance. When it is said, that God winked at these times of ignorance, it may mean, that he seemed to connive at, or not to take notice of this universal ignorance that had overspread the world, so as to send his prophets to them for their reformation ; or, he overlooked it by way of displeasure. He would not favour them with an explicit call to repentance ; or, by way of forbearance, ignorant and idolatrous as the world was, he did not destroy it.

The gospel was first introduced with a loud call to repentance. Matt. iii. 2. “Repent,” &c. was the united cry of John the Baptist, Christ, and his disciples ; and the apostle sums up the substance of his preaching in these two articles, Acts xx. 21.

Repentance is universally acknowledged to be an essential ingredient in the religion of a sinner.

Consider,

I. The nature and effects of evangelical repentance.

Now it is evident, that every pang of sorrow for sin, and every instance of reformation, is not this repentance. If horror of conscience and fears of hell, could constitute true repentance, then Judas would have been a true penitent ; if sudden pangs of terror and remorse, with some resolutions to amend, could constitute repentance, then Felix ; if a reformation in many instances, &c. then Herod would have been a true penitent.

1. True evangelical repentance extends to the heart as well as the practice. Ps. li. 5—10.

2. Repentance implies a deep sense of the evil of sin, and a hearty sorrow for it, as done against God ; Ps. v. 4. Gen. xxxix. 9 ; and after it is pardoned, Ezek. xvi. 63 ; xxxvi. 31.

3. True penitence extends to all known sin. Ps. cxix. 128.

4. It always includes reformation. Rom. vi. 14. Prov. xxviii. 13.

And, lastly, evangelical repentance implies a believing application to God for pardon, in and through Jesus Christ : it does not consist of horror and despair.

We may here also observe,

1. Degenerate nature can never produce this repentance ; it is the peculiar mark of the Spirit. Acts v. 31.

2. A newly-awakened sinner may not feel all these marks. No ; he is first alarmed with terror and dreadful apprehensions of punishment.

3. The mean to attain to this repentance. Reflect on your sins, their number, &c. Ezek. i. 2, 3.

II. Apply the subject, by an illustration of the other parts of the text.

1. Publish the royal edict of the King of Heaven. God commandeth all men every where to repent. He commands them in various ways : by the motions of the Spirit ; by conscience, which is the voice of God ; by his providence, which tends to lead to repentance ; and especially by the gospel. Luke xiii. 5. It is the King of kings that has issued out his royal mandate to repent.

2. The text tells us, he commands all men to repent ; that is, all men, of all ranks and characters. This command is binding upon all. The great God says to all, Repent, young and old : repent, young sinners ; repent, ye old gray-headed-veterans ; repent, ye rich, ye are not above the command ; ye poor, ye are not beneath it : masters, servants, &c.

3. To render the call still more pointed, it is added, he "commandeth all men every where to repent." Every where, in city and country, in palaces and cottages, wherever the trumpet of the gospel sounds the alarm. Nay, it extends as far as human nature ; as far as the utmost boundaries of the guilty globe. To the busy merchant in his storehouse, the labourer in the field, the tradesman in his shop, the sailor tossing on the waves, the inhabitant on solid ground ; the judge on the bench, as well as the criminal in the dungeon ; the man of sobriety, as the rake and debauchee ; the minister in the pulpit, the people in the pews, the dissenter in the meeting-house, to the conformist in the church ; husbands and wives, parents and children : nay, in short, if we are men, we are sinners, and God commandeth us to repent.

Nor are we allowed to delay ; repentance is a present duty. Now he commandeth, &c. now, when the times of ignorance are over ; now, when the gospel is preached.

The Lord pour upon us the spirit of repentance ! Zech. xii. 10.

THE RIGHTEOUS ANTICIPATING

THE RECOMPENSE OF REWARD.

Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.
Ps. xcvi. 11.

IN these words we have a cordial sent from heaven for the relief of those who are mourning on their way thither. A seed-time is here supposed, which, how sorrowful soever, shall be followed with a joyful harvest. "Light is sown," &c.

I. What is sown ? Light or gladness.

Both words denoting the same thing ; as darkness and trouble, so light and gladness, are used in scripture as terms equivalent. Isa. viii. 22.

Trouble, like darkness, is disconsolate and frightful ; but gladness is fitly represented by light. Hence the Psalmist, Ps. cxii. 4 ; *i. e.* comfort under affliction and distress : thus the Jews in Esther's time, "had light, gladness, and joy." Esther viii. 15, 16.

This light and gladness are said to be sown ; *i. e.* to be prepared, reserved, and safely laid up ; as corn-seed committed with care and caution to the prepared earth, in order to an after-harvest.

The figurative term, taking from sowing seed, plainly imports,

1. That the joy designed for the righteous is, as to the fulness of it, yet future ; as reaping does not immediately follow sowing, &c.

2. That how little soever of this appear at present, nay, though it seemed to be buried like corn under the clods, it shall spring forth, grow

up, and ripen to a blessed harvest. Ps. cxxvii. 5, 6. Light and gladness have a pleasing sound, in which every one is desirous to share; the seeds are precious, and the fruit or product shall be answerable. Light is sown that shall rise up to glory: gladness, that shall issue in fulness of joy. The blessing intended, in either term, carries with it its own commendation: its excellency is above the need of help of words to set it off; for who can attempt to paint a sun-beam without taking off from its lustre?

Light, what more beautiful? Gladness, what more desirable? Who would not reach the felicity they are chosen to denote! But they must be prepared for it. This seed is sown for the righteous and upright in heart: these only are the expectants of this blissful harvest. "Light is sown for the righteous," &c.

II. For whom.

1. The righteous. Upon the mention of this, that passage is apt to strike, Rom. iii. 10. Nevertheless, every believer is said to be righteous.

2. As found in Christ, "who is the end of the law," &c. Rom. x. 4. This is the contrivance of infinite wisdom and grace, worthy of God, "That by one man's obedience," &c. Rom. v. 19.

2. Believers are righteous, as conformed to Christ, 2 Cor. v. 17. Rom. vi. 6. Eph. iv. 22. Col. iii. 9, 10.

4. Upright in heart they are styled. This is the same with being righteous, and denotes that the heart comes under God's all-seeing eye; Jer. xvii. 10; that every man is, in God's account, as his heart; that uprightness of life must have its root in an upright heart. "Make the tree good," &c. Matt. xii. 35. For such, then, as are the righteous and upright in heart, are light and gladness sown; such, therefore, have good ground to expect a blissful harvest.

III. Where it is sown.

1. Light is sown for the righteous in the purpose of God. Jer. xxix. 11. God is willing that the "heirs of promise should have strong consolation," &c. Heb. vi. 18.

2. In the purchase of Christ. John xiv. 27; 1 Pet. i. 18.

3. In the office of the Spirit. John xvi. 7.

4. In the promises of the word, particularly such as relate to the light of God's countenance. Matt. v. 8. The protection of his power. Ps. xci. 1, &c. lv. 22. Gen. xv. 1. His presence and support under trouble and affliction. Isa. xli. 10. Heb. xii. 11. 2 Cor. i. 4, 5. Deliverance from evils which they feel or fear. 2 Pet. ii. 9. He has promised. Ps. xci. 15. He exhorts. Isa. xxvi. 20. Such as relate to inward peace in outward trouble. Ps. cxlii. 4. John xvi. 33. Direction of providence. Prov. iii. 6. Ps. xxxii. 8. Rom. viii. 28. In such promises as relate to a free access to the throne of grace, &c. Prov. xv. 8.

5. Light is sown in the work of grace begun in the heart. Isa. xxxii. 17.

And, lastly, light is sown in the promises that relate to the future glory of the saints. Rev. xxi. 7. John xiii. 7, &c.

IV. The season of reaping.

The first-fruits here, more fully at death, and more fully still at the morning of the resurrection, and continued through eternity.

1. Time of affliction. Isa. lxiii. 13.
2. Season of suffering. John xvi. 33. 2 Cor. i. 5.
3. After sore conflicts with Satan. Matt. iv. 11. Rev. ii. 17. Isa. liv. 7, 8.
4. In waiting on the Lord in means of grace. Isa. xl. 31. Ps. xxvii. 14.
5. A fuller reaping-time will be at death. Luke xxiii. 43.
6. The final harvest-home will be at the resurrection morn. Rev. vii. 15—17.

Inferences :

1. Is light sown for the righteous ? &c. It is plain that in making our evidences for heaven, we must begin within.

2. Is light sown ? &c. It may not appear strange, if darkness be then, for a season, their lot, as seed sown does not immediately spring ; have need of patience. James v. 7, 8.

3. Is light sown ? &c. Let none conclude themselves not of the number, because they have not the present comfort that they could wish for.

4. Seeing that light is sown, &c. This should encourage us to wait, expecting some season of reaping.

And, lastly, what a blessed change will the mournful, doubting believer experience at death ! That, that is the fulness.

AN INTEREST IN GOD,

THE BEST ANTIDOTE AGAINST SLAVISH FEAR.

Fear thou not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.
Isa. xli. 10.

THE word of God is an inexhaustible source of instruction and comfort. There are passages in it suited to persons in all states and conditions ; but it is calculated, more especially, to encourage the diffident and the afflicted souls. The passage before us is peculiarly adapted to those who see themselves weak and helpless ; in its primary sense, it is an encouragement to the Jews ; in its spiritual meaning, it extends to the church of God in all ages.

I. The prohibition : “ Fear thou not ; be not dismayed.”

What is it believers are not to fear ?

1. They are not to fear God himself ; *i. e.* with a slavish fear. Rom. viii. 15. 1 John iv. 18. A filial fear they must have. Ps. lxxxix. 7. Heb. xii. 28.

2. The people of God are not to fear man. Isa. lvii. 11. Matt. x. 28. Not to fear the wrath of man. Ps. cxxiv. 1—3 ; lxxvi. 11. The power of man. Heb. xiii. 6. Isa. xxxvii. 29. The policy of man. Job v. 12, 13. 1 Cor. i. 25. The instruments of human cruelty. Isa. liv. 17.

3. They are not to fear suffering or affliction. John xvi. 33. Job v. 19—22. 2 Cor. iv. 17. Rom. viii. 18.

4. Are not to fear Satan. Rom. xvi. 20.

5. Death. Rom. viii. 38, 39. 1 Cor. xv. 55.

6. Hell. John iii. 18 ; v. 36. Isa. liv. 9.

The reasons why they ought not to fear. It dishonours God.

It slanders his power, for he is God. 1 Chron. xvii. 24.

His faithfulness. 2 Tim. ii. 13. 1 Thess. v. 24.

His wisdom. 1 Tim. i. 17.

His care. 1 Pet. v. 7. Matt. vii. 11. Isa. xxvii. 3.

Their calling. They are called to be saints. Isa. li. 2.

Their cause, viz. religion. The cause of God. Deut. xxxiii. 29.

It is hurtful to them : it distracts their minds. Luke viii. 22—25.

Produces hypocrisy and dissimulation. Isa. lvii. 11. Gen. xx. 2—11.

Fear enfeebles the soul. Isa. vii. 2.

It strengthens the enemy. Judges iii. 12.

Discourages the saints. Deut. xx. 8.

II. The antidotes prescribed, "I am with thee," &c.

This is not to be understood of God's essential presence ; Jer. xxiii.

24. Ps. cxxxix. 7 ; or his being with them as to his common providence ; Acts xvii. 27, 28. Col. i. 17 ; but his gracious presence, and implies,

1. His favour. Lev. xxvii. 11. Ex. xxxiii. 16.

2. Spiritual communion. 1 John i. 3. Ps. iv. 6.

3. Guidance and direction. Ps. lxxviii. 52. Ex. xiii. 21. Deut. xxxii. 10.

4. Assistance. Ex. iv. 12. Ps. cxliv. 1. Isa. xliii. 3.

5. Protection in danger. Num. xxiii. 21, 22. Ps. xlv. 7—11 ; xxiii. 4.

"I am thy God."

1. The Lord is their God, *i. e.* his attributes and perfections are theirs : his eternity, Deut. xxxiii. 27, omnipotence, Gen. xvii. 1, faithfulness, &c. God is theirs relatively : their Redeemer, Isa. xli. 14, shepherd, Ps. xxiii. 1, friend, Cant. v. 16. Isa. lxiii. 1—3, physician, Ex. xv. 26. Ps. cxlvii. 3, &c. It imports an interest in all that God hath. Rom. viii. 32. 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22. All he hath promised them, "Fear not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed, I am thy God ;" and Ps. cxxi. 5—8.

Inferences :

1. The dignity, riches, and happiness of God's people : they have the favour and protection of heaven : God himself is theirs. Ps. cxlv. 15.

2. The believer, however afflicted, should be content with his lot. 2 Cor. vi. 10.

3. The folly of those who seek after happiness in the creature. Isa. lv. 2 ; Prov. xxiii. 5 ; Isa. l. 11.

4. The madness of those who persecute the church of Christ. Isa. viii. 9, 10 ; xxxvii. 23, 24.

5. The necessity of seeking a covenant relation with God.

THE GOSPEL CALL AND PROMISE.

Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.—Eph. v. 14.

THERE is an harmony in the scriptures, which many overlook and destroy; detached passages are often wrested to establish a favourite system; but the various truths of God should be viewed as they stand connected with each other: there would then be diversity indeed, but no contrariety between them. Compare Ezek. xviii. 31; Ps. li. 10; Ezek. xxxvi. 26. This observation will throw light, as on many other parts of Scripture, so on the text in particular; in which we have,

I. A command: “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.”

The scripture abounds with useful and instructive metaphors. The state of the unregenerate is here represented under the images of sleep and death. Sleep implies,

1. A state of insensibility; all the senses are closed. Were the most lovely objects present to a person asleep, he could see no beauty in them; were the most delicious spices exhibited to a person asleep, he hath no taste to relish them; the most delightful music cannot charm one who is asleep.

2. Insensible of their state. Rev. iii. 17.

3. Danger. Jonah i. 4, 5.

4. Inactivity. Men are busily employed about their worldly concerns; but how inactive with regard to the things of God and their souls!

Death includes the ideas of impotence and corruption.

An inanimate body cannot perform any of the functions of life: it has within itself the seeds and principles of corruption. The soul also, till quickened by the Spirit, is,

1. In a state of impotence; Rom. v. 6; incapable of any spiritual action or discernment. John xv. 5; 1 Cor. ii. 14.

2. Its powers and faculties are altogether vitiated. Rom. vii. 18.

3. Whatever is loathsome and offensive to God proceeds from it; Mark vii. 21, 22; so true is that humiliating declaration, Job xv. 14—16.

Yet, notwithstanding this state appears so desperate, the divine command is,

“Awake,” &c.

Insensibility and inactivity involve the unregenerate in the deepest guilt: their corruption of heart and life provokes the Majesty of Heaven; nor is their impotence any excuse for their disobedience; it is their love of sin that disables them for duty. Let every one, therefore, strive to comply with the heavenly call; and they who exert their feeble powers, will find divine assistance. Matt. xii. 10—13.

To convince us that none shall fail who attend to this divine injunction, God enforces his command with,

II. A promise: “Christ shall give thee light.”

Sleep and death are states of intellectual darkness; hence, light is promised to those who obey the divine mandate; which implies,

1. Knowledge, or divine illumination. All need it ; none but Christ can give it. Isa. viii. 20. Matt. xi. 27. Prov. ii. 3—6.

2. Holiness. 1 John i. 7. 1 Cor. i. 30. Let none be discouraged ; Matt. i. 21 ; the promise shall be fulfilled. Mic. vii. 19. Isa. i. 25.

3. Comfort ; Ps. xcvi. 11. Isa. xxix. 19 ; lxi. 3. Divine energy shall succeed weakness. Isa. xxxv. 5, 6. Their joy shall be spiritual joy ; Isa. lviii. 11 ; exceed all carnal mirth : Ps. lxxxiv. 10 ; iv. 6, 7.

4. Glory. Col. i. 12. Jesus Christ will not confine his blessings to this life ; Ps. lxxxiv. 11 : he will raise his people to thrones, and to an everlasting inheritance ; Rev. iii. 21 ; Rom. viii. 17 ; 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

Application :

1. What greater encouragement can any one desire ? “ Our light is come, and the glory of the Lord hath arisen upon us ; ” (therefore, we may, and ought to) “ arise and be enlightened.”

2. How suited are the promises to our necessities !

3. Let every one consider the command as addressed to him, “ Awake thou.” Rom. xiii. 11.

4. Let us exert ourselves, and expect the promised aid ; thus shall we be eternal monuments of Christ's power and grace.

THE

CHRISTIAN'S GREAT CONSOLATION.

All things work together for good to them that love God.—Rom. viii. 28.

“ IF God be for us, who can be against us ? ” Verse 31. “ Who can be against us ? ” *i. e.* none. For those who appear to be against us, are eventually for us ; “ Joseph is not,” &c. Gen. xlii. 36. “ All these things are against me ; ” yet all these things were eventually for him. “ We know,” says the apostle, “ that all things work together for good to them that love God.” All things ; not only good but evil things. The sin of the first Adam made way for the righteousness of the second. Rom. v. 17, 18. Affliction ; sin brought affliction into the world, affliction carries sin out : the blood of the Lamb takes away our sin ; and sometimes the blood of the sheep. Isa. xxvii. 9. Every cross providence is a step towards the accomplishment of the promise. All things work : not they shall work, but are now working ; not only friends, but enemies, Isa. x. 6, 7. The power and policy of Satan, as well as the perfections of God ; the temptations of the devil, as well as the promises of God ; as they are overruled by infinite wisdom, and almighty power, for the good of the saints. The water cast out of the mouth of the serpent, Rev. xii. 15, is sometimes an occasion of washing the woman, *i. e.* the church, the whiter. All things work, the rod as well as the staff ; all things work together ; all second causes work together with God, the First Cause, and all second causes work together. As the different virtues of different drugs concur to make up the medicine ; as the different strings or instruments of music make harmony, or the

different colours (the dark shades as well as the light) contribute to the beauty of the picture ; no less do the most contrary events add to the beauty of providence. " All things work together for good." 2 Cor. iv. 17. The saints shall not only have weight for weight, measure for measure, a load of glory for a load of suffering, but over-weight, over-measure ; good measure, pressed down, heaped together, running over, shall be given them ; for their bottles of tears they shall have flagons of joy and rivers of pleasure. " All things work together for good to them that love God."

To make this appear clear, prove it by the following proposition :

I. There is a Divine Providence that governs the world.

Those who deny Providence, may as well deny there is a God ; the one is consequent upon the other. The scripture is clear on this head ; Ps. xcvi. 1, 2 ; cxlv. 15, 16 ; xxxvi. 6 ; lxxv. 6, 7. Amos iii. 6. Ps. xvii. 13, 14. Eph. i. 11 ; the confession of Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 34, 35, and Darius, Dan. vi. 26.

The Lord governs all inanimate and sensitive creatures in their actions : he orders the stars in their courses ; Judges v. 20 ; he governs the winds and the floods ; Jer. x. 13 ; " he maketh the clouds his chariot, he rideth on the wings of the wind, and sitteth on the water-floods ;" the thunder, rain, hail, &c. are all at his command ; Ps. civ. 3 ; cxlvii. 16, 17 ; the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the stones, and the dust of the earth, are all at his beck.

More especially, he governs the men of the world. He sits in the councils of the great, and orders their decrees ; he changes the times and seasons, kingdoms and governments ; Ps. lxxv. 7 ; " he maketh war, and createth peace." Isa. xlv. 5—7. " The Lord bendeth the bow, and breaketh it, and cutteth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariot in the fire : " peace and war, health and sickness, life and death, are all in his hand. He is over his creatures as master over his family, shepherd over his flock, king over his subjects, pilot in the ship, and he will guide it to the haven of his own glory. Ps. lxxiii. 24.

II. The design of providence, (as it respects the saints,) is the accomplishment of God's purpose and promise.

Providence governs the world : the purpose and promise of God govern providence. Notwithstanding the cruelty of Joseph's brethren, the difficulties that he met with, he declares " God sent him." Gen. xlv. 7, 8. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. Notwithstanding the difficulties that Israel met with in the wilderness, the Psalmist declares, Ps. cvii. 7. And notwithstanding the treachery of Judas, the cruelty of the Jews, &c. towards our blessed Lord ; yet Peter declares, Acts ii. 23.

III. Providence cannot fail in accomplishing this end.

1. Providence hath power with it. He who ruleth on earth dwelleth in heaven. Ps. ciii. 19. Job xxvi. 11—14. Dan. iv. 35.

2. Providence hath wisdom with it. He is the " only wise God." Ps. cxxxix. 1—4. 2 Pet. ii. 9.

3. Providence hath faithfulness with it. Ps. xxv. 10 ; cxi. 8. 1 Kings viii. 24.

Is there a Divine Providence that governs the world ? Is the design

of Providence, (as it respects the saints,) the accomplishment of God's purpose and promise? Is the God of providence a God of almighty power, infinite wisdom, and faithful to his promise, then providence cannot fail in accomplishing this end; therefore, "all things (must) work together for good (or, as some read it, the *best*) to them that love God."

Inferences:

1. What ground for consolation to those who can say with Peter, John xxi. 17.

2. Let us rest quietly on the declaration in the text, and say with Jacob, "It is enough." Let us see to it that we are holy, and God will see to it that we are happy: "All things work together for good to them that love God."

LOVE TO GOD AND MAN,

THE SUBSTANCE OF ALL RELIGION.

Now the end of the commandment is charity, (i. e. love,) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.—1 Tim. i. 5.

ST. PAUL wishes grace and peace, in his Epistles to the churches. To Timotheus he adds mercy, the most tender grace towards those who stand in need of it, verse 2. The experience of this prepares a man to be a minister of the gospel.

Verse 3, "Charge some to teach no other doctrine" than I have taught; let them put nothing in the place of it, add nothing to it.

Verse 4. "Neither give heed," so as either to teach or regard them, "to fables," fabulous Jewish traditions, and endless genealogies. Not those delivered in scripture, but the long, intricate pedigrees, whereby they strove to prove their descent from such or such a person, which afford questions; which lead only to useless and endless controversies: "Whereas, the end of the commandment," of the whole Christian institution, "is love," &c.

I. The commandment.

By the commandment we may understand,

1. The moral law. The law is called a commandment,

1. On account of the natural authority of the truths themselves: the law contains nothing but what must needs be a creature's duty.

2. On account of the authority of the Legislator, who is God, our Sovereign Master. Matt. xxiii. 10.

2. The preaching of the gospel. God, in order to discover the mysteries of the gospel to men, not only sent the apostles at the beginning, not only gave us the scriptures, but hath also established a gospel-ministry in his church; Jesus Christ sanctified this mean by his own example. Heb. ii. 3.

3. In general, true religion. Religion is called a commandment,

1. Because it is not an indifferent thing, which may be delayed if we please; it is a necessary obligation imposed on man, Job xxviii. 28.

2. Because religion, in all parts, ought to proceed from God; Matt. xv. 9; xvi. 12; and the apostle prays, Heb. xiii. 21.

II. The end of the command, love.

1. What this love is.

(1.) The principal object of our love is God : to an union with whom the soul elevates itself, by emotions of love, desire, gratitude, sympathy, acquiescence, and joy : and by emotions of zeal in his service. This love makes God reign over us in a manner the most noble and worthy of himself. He reigns over all creatures by his influence, providence, or by his justice ; but he reigns in the hearts of his saints by love. When we give our love to the creature, we insult God, we injure ourselves.

(2.) Our neighbour. If wicked men, with a love of compassion ; Matt. v. 44 ; if good people, with complacency and delight. 1 John iv. 10, 11.

2. How is this love the end of the commandment ?

(1.) The end of the moral law. Matt. xxii. 37—40. A heart devoid of love is incapable of serving either God or man.

(2.) The end which ought to be proposed in preaching the gospel is love. Col. i. 28 ; Eph. iv. 11—13, 15, 16.

(3.) If by the commandment we understand religion in general, it is no less evident that its end is love. Whatever it proposes to us of mysteries, precepts, doctrines, objects of faith, or objects of hope, all are fruits of God's paternal love towards us, and consequently motives to love him with all our souls. Religion establishes a society, the bond of which is love. All is common here ; God is all of all, Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all. His blood, his merit, his Spirit, his kingdom, his heaven, all belong to the church, without distinction ; they are, therefore, all brethren.

III. The principles from which this love ought to proceed.

1. A pure heart ; *i. e.*

(1.) A sincere and honest heart, opposed to a double and hypocritical heart. Rom. xii. 9.

(2.) A sanctified heart, disengaged from idolatry and uncleanness. Matt. v. 8.

(3.) We may also understand, a heart opposed to perplexity and embarrassment, as that of a superstitious heart.

2. A good conscience ; which is almost the same as the pure heart. To love God with a good conscience, is to love him sincerely, free from scrupulosity, without fraud, hypocrisy, mixture of interest, independent of self-love ; with a real and faithful application to all that regards his glory, the obedience of his commands. So to love him, as to assure ourselves that we do love him ; so that when we examine ourselves on this head we may be satisfied.

3. Faith unfeigned. Which means that faith is the parent of this love. It is from the knowledge and persuasion of God's love towards us, that this love arises in our hearts, both to God and man. 1 John iv. 19 ; iii. 16—19. Faith unfeigned ; *i. e.* true, lively ; not speculative, but experimental and practical. 1 John v. 10.

THE CHARACTER AND BLESSEDNESS OF THE LOWLY.

Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly.

Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

IN the beginning of this psalm, the Psalmist enters upon a firm resolution to praise the Lord. He lays down several excellent grounds of praise in the body of the psalm. He resolves to praise God for the experience he had of his love and faithfulness, in the accomplishment of his gracious promises, as verse 2. The Lord has a greater regard to the words of his mouth, than the work of his hands.

For the experience he had of his goodness, in hearing his prayers, verse 3. The Lord granted him a speedy answer; it was the day he cried. It was a spiritual answer; he was strengthened. "He giveth power to the faint," &c. Isa. xl. 29.

For the calling of the gentiles, which he foresaw by the spirit of prophecy, verses 4, 5. The enlargement of Zion's borders fills the believer's mouth with praise, &c. And,

For his condescension: "Though the Lord be high," &c. "Though the Lord be high:" we have the Lord's transcendent greatness. He is the high Lord, or Jehovah. "He is the high and lofty One, who dwelleth in the high and holy place." Isa. lvii. 15. Who can think or speak of his highness in a suitable manner? There are none among the sons of the mighty that can be compared to him. Isa. xl. 15. He is not only high among men, but above angels. Cherubim and seraphim are his ministering spirits. He is high above the heavens; 1 Kings viii. 27; and he humbleth himself when he beholdeth the things that are in heaven; for "honour and majesty are before him, strength and beauty are in his sanctuary;" Ps. xvi. 6; yet to that man doth he look. Isa. lvii. 15.

Consider,

I. The character of the lowly, or humble.

Lowliness, or humility, being a relative grace, we may consider it,

1. As it respects ourselves. And it implies,

Low thoughts of ourselves. Of our persons, as David, Ps. xxii. 6. Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 10. Of our pedigree: not like the princes of Zoan, who valued themselves because they were the offspring of ancient kings; but like David, 2 Sam. vii. 18, he considers himself as a degenerate plant of a strange vine. Ps. li. 5. Of his abilities; 2 Cor. iii. 5. Of his attainments, Prov. xxx. 2. Phil. iii. 12, 13. He values himself least, when others value him most; when the multitude are crying, "Hosanna to the son of David!" he is riding meek and lowly on an ass.

2. Consider the lowly man with respect to others.

(1.) He prefers others before himself. Phil. ii. 3. Rom. xii. 10.

(2.) He looks on the gifts and graces of others without envy. Num. xi. 29. He does not say, with the pharisee, Luke xviii. 11. He sinks in his own esteem, when he looks on others; as Agur, Prov. xxx. 2. Affable and courteous to all. 1 Pet. iii. 8.

3. This lowliness or humility may be considered with reference to God ; and implies,

(1.) High and admiring thoughts of his majesty. When God discovers himself, the man sinks in his own esteem. Ex. xv. 11.

(2.) A holy fear of God. Isa. viii. 13.

(3.) He is astonished at the divine goodness. Ps. viii. 4.

(4.) He gives all glory to God. 1 Cor. xv. 10.

(5.) He cheerfully acquiesces with all the dispensations of Providence. 1 Sam. iii. 18. 2 Kings xx. 19. The humble man is content to be any thing, or nothing, that Christ may be all in all. Isa. xlv. 24, 25. Phil. iii. 8. 9.

II. How the Lord has respect to the lowly.

1. When Christ was on earth he showed a particular respect to the lowly. Matt. viii. 8 ; xv. 27.

2. Humility is a grace of the Spirit, and a sign of more. 1 Pet. v. 5.

3. Honour and preferment are intended for him. Ps. cxiii. 7, 8.

4. The eye of the Lord is on him. Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

5. Not only his eye is on him, but his ear is open to him. Ps. x. 17.

6. The great Jehovah dwells with him. Isa. lvii. 15. He says of the humble soul, "This is my rest for ever." Ps. cxxxii. 14.

7. As God dwells with the humble, so the humble shall dwell with him. Matt. v. 3.

To conclude.

This humility becomes us.

1. We are creatures sprung out of the earth. Jer. xxii. 29.

2. We are poor, frail creatures, Isa. xl. 6—8 ; sinful creatures, Rom. iii. 23 ; impotent, Rom. v. 6.

We have many noble patters of humility : Jacob, Gen. xxxii. 10 ; Isaiah, Isa. vi. 5 ; St. Paul, Eph. iii. 8 ; Jesus Christ, Phil. ii. 8.

Again, how offensive pride is in the sight of God ! Prov. vi. 16, 17. A proud look is the first. Isa. ii. 11—17. Pride turned angels into devils, and cast them from heaven to hell. "Being lifted up with pride, they fell into condemnation." Man out of paradise. We might trace the ruins it hath brought on the ungodly world : Pharaoh, Ex. xv. 5 ; Haman, Esther vii. 10 ; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. iv. 30, 31. So true is Prov. xxix. 23 ; xv. 25.

To obtain humility, view the perfections of God, as displayed in the work of creation, providence, &c. Job xlii. 5, 6.

Let us view the rock whence we were hewn. Job. xvii. 14.

And, lastly, let us copy after the Lord Jesus Christ. Phil. ii. 5—8.

THE BURNING BUSH,

A MOST WONDERFUL SIGHT.

And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.—Ex. iii. 3.

THE dealings of God with his people have ever been mysterious : the history of the children of Israel verifies it. Moses forms a very con-

spicuous figure amongst them, in the sacred pages, in his birth, preservation, qualification, and arduous undertaking; but eminently adapted and assisted by the infinite power of Jehovah.

In reference to the situation in which he was placed when he saw the great sight referred to in the text, observe, that, on account of his zeal discovered on behalf of his brethren, then in a state of captivity, "Pharaoh sought to slay him," &c. Ex. ii. 15; iii. 2, 3. This strange sight doubtless filled him with surprise and astonishment, when he exclaimed, "Now I will turn aside," &c.

I. Endeavour to discover some of the grand views which may be considered as emblematically represented by the bush burning with fire, and not consumed.

1. The flaming fire would suggest to him the presence of the Deity. He appeared, in those times, more than once in that manner: when he proclaimed himself the great Legislator, Ex. xix. 16—18, to the prophets. Isa. vi. 6. Ezek. i. 4. Dan. vii. 9, 10.

2. The bush burning, and not consumed, might denote the awfulness of his offended justice. Deut. iv. 21. Mal. iii. 2.

3. Faith might therein discover the incarnation and sufferings of Christ.

(1.) The bush may represent his human nature. Isa. liii. 2.

(2.) The flame of fire may shadow forth his divine nature. Deut. iv. 24.

(3.) The union of the flame with the bush may denote the union of the Divine with the human nature. Hence prays Moses, Deut. xxxiii. 16.

(4.) Here also a shadow of those dreadful sufferings by which sin should be expiated. The wrath of God every where in Scripture compared to fire. Yet Christ endured those fierce flames: "he bore our sins," &c. Heb. ix. 28, and was not consumed.

(5.) From the suffering of the Head, we may descend to the sufferings of the members. Let the bush be also an emblem of the church, collectively and individually; weak, helpless, and, in the eyes of the world, contemptible; let the fire denote their exercising trials, temptations, persecutions, &c. The bush burning and not consumed, is expressive of the church's preservation and support, amidst the ragings of the hottest flames. Dan. iii. 16—25. Isa. xliii. 1, 2.

(6.) This view serves not only as an intimation of support, but also of sanctification to the believer. Luke iii. 16. Mal. iii. 2, 3.

II. Show how this may justly be accounted a great sight.

If it was a great sight to the enlarged mind of Moses, it must surely be so to us; especially when that which was covered with a veil is now clearly manifested.

1. It was the great I AM who exhibited this sight. Ex. iii. 14.

2. As it was designed to afford a bright gleam of hope to Israel, that their bondage was nearly over; verses 7, 8; and if we transfer our minds from a temporal to a spiritual deliverance, we shall discern redemption through Christ here intimated. Moses was a typical mediator, and the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt pointed to a more glorious redemption of lost sinners. Thus, some of the grandest events that ever took place in the universe are here faintly represented, and may justly be deemed a great sight. Besides, Moses was skilled in the hieroglyphic

literature of the Egyptians, and they figured out many things, great and eminent, by fire and flame.

III. In order to see this great sight, we must, like Moses, "turn aside,"

1. From the world. 1 John ii. 15. 2 Cor. vi. 17.

2. Carnal reasoning. 1 Cor. ii. 14. John iii. 9.

3. All known sin; else would the eyes be blinded, and not able to see the great sight. Eph. iv. 17, 18. 2 Pet. i. 9.

Inferences:

1. How amazing the depth of wisdom contained in the scriptures! Search them. John v. 39.

2. If Moses so anxiously turned aside to see this great sight, which was but emblematically represented, how inexcusable must those be who remain indifferent about things of eternity, so clearly revealed! Col. i. 26, 27. 2 Cor. ii. 14. Heb. ii. 3.

3. Would you see this great sight, attend to the above directions. Cry to God for the Spirit's enlightening influence, that you may be taught wonderful things out of God's law, and prize the precious discoveries of the gospel.

THE GOSPEL, THE PERFECT LAW OF LIBERTY.

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, &c.—James i. 25.

THE law that St. James here speaks of, in verse 23, he calls the word; verse 21, the ingrafted word; *i. e.* the gospel, or the new covenant. The gospel is often invested with this title or appellation of the law, Rom. viii. 2, in opposition to the covenant of works.

I. The gospel is a law.

The gospel may be called a law, because every thing that concurrerh to the right constitution and making of a law is found in the gospel; as,

1. Equity. All the precepts of the gospel are just and equitable. Rom. vii. 12.

2. Promulgation, which is the life and form of a law. So the gospel is preached. Mark xvi. 15. Isa. lxi. 1.

3. The author, God; who has a right to prescribe to the creature. "Gospel of God;" 1 Tim. i. 11.

4. The end, public good; and the end of the gospel is salvation. Rom. i. 16.

5. By this law we must walk. Gal. vi. 16. Controversies decided; Isa. viii. 20; our states judged. Hence the gospel is a law. Rom. ii. 16.

II. A law of liberty.

1. Because it teacheth the way to true liberty. Liberty from sin, &c. John viii. 36. Rom. vi. 18.

2. The bond of obedience, that is laid on us in the gospel, is perfect freedom.

(1.) The matter. Duty is the greatest liberty, and sin the greatest bondage. Ps. cxix. 45. 2 Pet. ii. 19.

(2.) We do it upon free principles. The motives of the gospel are mercy and grace, and obedience performed out of gratitude or thankfulness. Rom. xii. 1. Titus ii. 12.

(3.) We have the assistance of a free Spirit. Ps. li. 12.

(4.) We do it in a free state. Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 31. Luke i. 74.

III. A perfect law of liberty.

1. When compared with the law of Moses. Heb. x. 1, 2.

2. It directs us to the greatest perfection. 1 John iv. 18.

3. Because it is pure, free from error. Ps. cxix. 140.

And, lastly, because it maketh perfect. Ps. xix. 7.

IV. "Whoso looketh."

A metaphor taken from those who do not only glance upon a thing, but bend their body towards it, that they may pierce it with their eyes, and narrowly pry into it. The same word is used for the stooping down of the disciples to look into Christ's sepulchre; Luke xxiv. 12. John xx. 4, 5; and that narrow search which the angels use to find out the mysteries of salvation, 1 Pet. i. 12, where there is a plain allusion to the cherubim, whose faces were bowed down towards the ark, as desirous to see the mysteries therein contained; and implieth,

1. Deepness of meditation. He doth not glance upon, but "looketh into the perfect law of liberty." Ps. cxix. 97.

2. Diligence of inquiry. They do not content themselves with what is offered to their first thoughts, but accurately pry into the will of God revealed in the word. Prov. ii. 3, 4.

3. Liveliness of impression. They do so look upon it, as to find the virtue of it in their hearts; 2 Cor. iii. 18; such a gaze as bringeth the glory of the Lord into their hearts. As Moses' face shone by talking with God; and we, by conversing with the word, carry away the beauty and glory of it in our spirits.

V. And continueth therein; *i. e.* persevereth. John viii. 31. 2 John 9. He being not a forgetful hearer, but remembereth, so as to reduce to practice; verses 23, 24. Prov. iv. 20, 21. Luke ii. 19; a doer of the work. The gospel was not ordained only for speculation. Matt. iii. 8. John vi. 29. Heb. vi. 10. The apostle speaks of "a form of knowledge." Rom. ii. 20. Let not the tree of knowledge deprive us of the tree of life. Work the works of God: faith is our work, repentance our business, and the life of love and praise our duty. "This man shall be blessed in his deed;" alluding to Ps. i. 3; in his deed, not for it. Ps. xix. 11. He shall be blessed here with peace, Gal. vi. 16, and hereafter with eternal happiness. Rev. xxii. 14. "Take heed, therefore, how ye hear;" Luke viii. 18; for, "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." xi. 28.

JESUS CHRIST, THE PLANT OF RENOWN.

I will raise up for them a Plant of renown.—Ezek. xxxiv. 29.

IN this chapter we have many denunciations against the shepherds; verses 2—10; the flock comforted, verse 11, &c. a shepherd promised, verse 23; and the promise in the text given. Jesus Christ is always in scripture proposed as the object of his people's faith and hope: "I will raise up for them a Plant of renown." Jesus Christ gets a great many metaphorical names: sometimes he is called a Rose, a Branch, a Tree of Life, a Sun, a Door, a Way, &c. And, it appears, he is willing to be called almost any thing, to make himself known to us; so here he is called "a Plant of renown."

I. Premise a few things concerning this blessed Plant.

1. What is here ascribed to Christ, is not to be understood absolutely of him as God, but officially, as Mediator and Redeemer: as God, he is equal with the Father; as Man, or Mediator, he was raised up. Luke i. 69.

2. Jesus Christ, as a Plant, was small, or little, in the eyes of the world. Men looked on him as "a root out of a dry ground, and saw no comeliness, &c. in him; despised and rejected of men." Isa. liii. 2, 3.

3. We may remark, however contemptible this Plant is, in the eyes of the world, he is the tallest plant in God's Lebanon. John xv. 1.

4. All the little plants in the Lord's garden are grafted into this "Plant of renown." John xv. 5.

In what respects may Christ be called "a Plant of renown?"

He is renowned in heaven, and he is renowned on earth, and will be so. Ps. lxxii. 17.

1. He is renowned in his person, of two natures: God and man are joined together in one in him. This is the "mystery of godliness." 1 Tim. iii. 16.

2. For his antiquity. Prov. viii. 23. John viii. 58.

3. For his pedigree. Isa. liii. 8.

4. For his name. Isa. ix. 6.

5. For his veracity. Isa. xl. 5.

6. For his righteousness. Jer. xxiii. 6.

7. For his love. Rom. v. 8.

8. For his constancy. Heb. i. 12.

9. For his verdure. Rev. xxii. 2.

10. For his shade. Cant. ii. 3.

11. For his scent. Cant. i. 3.

And, lastly for his extent. He spread through the land of Judea, and now he is spreading through the whole world. Hab. ii. 14. &c.

III. We are to speak of the raising up of this Plant.

1. He was raised up in the counsel of God's peace from everlasting. Zech. vi. 13. Prov. viii. 23.

2. In the first promise, Gen. iii. 15, in all the promises, prophecies, types and doctrines of the Old Testament. These were the gradual springs of this Plant; but was under ground until.

3. His actual manifestation in the flesh. Gal. iv. 4.
 4. This Plant was raised up at his death on the cross. John iii. 14, &c.
 5. At his resurrection, he was "declared to be the Son of God with power," Rom. i. 4, &c. If this plant had not sprung up at his resurrection, our hopes had perished for ever. 1 Pet. i. 3.
 6. At his ascension. Ps. lxxviii. 18.
 7. By the preaching of the gospel, John iii. 14, 15.
 8. In the hearts of believers. Ps. lxxiii. 25.
- And, lastly, He will be raised up in the song of the redeemed for ever. Rev. i. 5, 6.

IV. For whom was this Plant raised up.

Not for the apostate angels, Heb. ii. 16, but for the fallen sons of Adam. Isa. ix. 6. Luke ii. 10, 11, &c. Mark xvi. 15, 16.

V. The end for which he was raised up.

1. As a redeemer, to set the captives of the mighty at liberty. Isa. xlix. 24, 25.
2. He is raised up as a Mediator of the new covenant. Dan. ix. 24. 2 Cor. v. 19. Rom. v. 10.
3. As a surety, to pay the debts of a company of broken debtors. Heb. vii. 22.
4. As a renowned Healer. Ex. xv. 26. As he is raised up for the recovery of diseased souls, he has opened a medicinal well. Zech. xiii. 1.
5. As a prophet. Deut. xviii. 18, 19.
6. As a Witness, Leader, Commander, &c. Isa. lv. 4.

Inferences :

1. It is our duty to raise up this Plant in our meditation, conversation, &c.
2. Lament that he is not more raised up in the world.
3. Invite all weary and heavy-laden sinners to repose under his shadow.
4. Study to commend him by the whole of our deportment, that he may be the glory in the midst of us. Zech. ii. 5.

THE POWER OF GOD DISPLAYED;

OR, THE GOSPEL A TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.—2 Cor. iv. 7.

THIS treasure is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which in Scripture is represented to us under various images, borrowed from human things. It is called a light, the day-spring from on high, life, resurrection, a net cast into the sea, a seed, &c. Here represented under the image of a treasure.

Consider,

I. The proposition : "We have this treasure in earthen vessels."

The gospel is a treasure.

1. On account of its excellency. What so valuable as the gospel of Christ? Prov. iii. 14, 15.

2. Because of its abundance. Here are infinite riches, &c. We may say with St. Paul, Rom. xi. 33.

3. For its truth and reality. Hence it is called, Matt. xiii. 44, 46.

4. Treasure, which cannot be possessed without joy, jealousy, caution, &c.

5. The apostle, verse 4, had called the gospel, light, glory, &c. This treasure, then, is a treasure of light, of glory, knowledge; and, what is more, of the light, the glory, and the knowledge of God.

6. The gospel may be considered as a treasure, either as received and possessed by simple believers, or as it is deposited in the hand of ministers in general, the apostles in particular. They had it in all its extent, degrees, and purity.

7. In opposition to the false treasures of the earth, which are nothing in comparison of this. Psalm xix. 7, 10.

8. This treasure was once hid, now revealed. Col. i. 26.

But this treasure, says the apostle, is in us, as in earthen vessels. When the Lord committed the dispensation of his word to angels, he put it into precious vessels. When he revealed it himself in visions, dreams, &c. it was, in its source, without vessels. When God committed his word to Moses and the prophets, he might be said to put the treasure in vessels of iron and brass. But, when he committed it to the apostles, it was put, properly speaking, into vessels of earth; as the lamps in Gideon's pitchers.

The apostles are,

1. Vessels, not authors of the gospel; but simply instruments. 1 Cor. iii. 5, 7.

2. Earthen vessels.

For the meanness of their condition.

For the afflictions to which they are subject.

In regard to their infirmities.

Observe the wisdom of the apostles.

When they were contemned for their meanness, they exalted themselves by this treasure, and called themselves servants of Christ, ambassadors, &c. But when the excellency of their ministry was likely to make them overvalued, they humbled, and, as it were, annihilated themselves, calling themselves earthen vessels. Acts xiv 8, 15.

II. The reason. That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

The excellency of this power consists,

1. In the happy success of the gospel, in the conversion of men. The difficulties it surmounted. It rose above obstacles within, natural corruptions of men, prejudices of birth, education, &c. Obstacles without, contradiction, of philosophers, persecution, calumny, &c. Obstacles in the gospel itself, which exhibited one that was crucified; foolishness to the Greeks, &c. 1 Cor. i. 23.

2. In that admirable and divine virtue which is in the doctrine of the gospel to humble man, to comfort, instruct, exhilarate, and embolden him; to fill with faith and hope, to convert and change, to sanctify and transform into another man. 2 Cor. v. 17.

3. In the miracles which accompanied the preaching of the apostles.

The sick healed, the dead raised, future events foretold, &c. Matt. x. 8.

4. In the energy of the Holy Ghost which accompanied the preaching of the gospel. He was a Spirit of illumination, patience, peace, &c. Gal. v. 22.

5. That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man. St. Paul's reasoning proceeds upon this principle, that men are inclined to ascribe to second causes, effects which belong only to the First Cause.

This appears,

1. By the example of the heathens, who, seeing the marvels of nature, worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.

2. By the Lycaonians. Acts xiv. 14.

3. By the Jews. Acts iii. 10, 12.

4. By the example of St. John. Rev. xxii. 8, 9.

God, then, in order to stem this torrent, and to preclude such an abuse of his apostles, as the attributing of the marvellous effects of the gospel to them, was pleased, while he employed them to convert mankind, to make them appear but earthen vessels, in order that their dust and ashes, their weaknesses and imperfections, might serve as a counterpoise to the glory of such an admirable ministry.

Moreover, it is certain their meanness very much contributed to display the glory of the divine power in the work of the gospel, and fully convince mankind, that the power was only of God. Never does God appear more conspicuous than when he uses instruments which have no proportion the work that they perform. Never did the divine power appear more glorious than when it abased the pride of Pharaoh and all Egypt by the simple rod of Moses. Had the Lord employed armies, however wonderful the success had been, human power would have diminished the divine splendour. Never did this power of God appear more than in the ruin of Jericho, the walls of which fell at the bare sound of Joshua's rams' horns. Never did the power of Jesus Christ appear more than when he subjugated principalities and powers, and triumphed over them by the ministry of the cross. The triumphs of the gospel are the same. Sinners, tax-gatherers, tent-makers, ignorant people, without arms, without power, without intrigues, without human help, without philosophy, without eloquence, contemptible, persecuted people; in one word, earthen vessels, triumphed over the whole world with the sound of their voice. Idols fell, temples were demolished, oracles were struck dumb, the reign of the devil was abolished, the strongest inclinations of nature were diverted from their course, people's ancient habits were changed, old superstitions annihilated, all the devil's charms, wherewith he had stupified mankind, were dissolved, people flocked in crowds to adore Jesus Christ. The great and the small, the learned and the ignorant, kings and subjects, whole provinces, presented themselves at the foot of the cross, and every thought was captivated to the obedience of Christ. It is not enough to say, "This is the finger of God;" Deut. ix. 10; we must rather exclaim, "This is the outstretched arm of Jehovah!" Deut. vii. 19. O happy earthen vessels! glory in that ye were only dust and ashes; your weakness, brittleness, and nothingness display a thousand times more the glory of the great Master who

employed you, than the greatest dignity could have displayed it, had ye been golden vessels, angels, or cherubim, dominions, or thrones!

Inferences :

1. Let us admire the wisdom and love of God for giving us this treasure in earthen vessels.

2. Esteem the earthen vessels for the treasures deposited therein. 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

Finally. Let us, both ministers and private Christians, seek for more of this treasure into our earthen vessels.

THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING CHRIST AND SALVATION.

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?—Heb. ii. 3.

THE Lord God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner; for as he is loving to every man, he would have all men to come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved. John iii. 16 : context, verses 1, 2, 3. Thus the inspired writer shows and enforces the excellency and preciousness of the redemption which is in and through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider,

I. That the gospel salvation is great.

1. The deliverance of Noah from the general destruction brought upon the old world was wonderful; but the deliverance of our souls from the deluge of God's wrath, by the gospel, is greater. The preservation of Lot from the destruction of Sodom was great; but the salvation we obtain by the gospel, from the vengeance of eternal fire, is greater. We may instance Daniel and the three children in the fiery furnace; yet all this is not to be compared with the deliverance accomplished by Jesus Christ for those who receive him. He saves them from the roaring lion, the devil, and from the fiery furnace, the smoke of which ascendeth up for ever and ever.

2. The author of this salvation, Isa. ix. 6, God manifest in the flesh. 1 Tim. iii. 16. Isa. lix. 16.

3. The means. Rom. viii. 3. He took our nature upon him, with all its miseries and infirmities, sin only excepted. Isa. liii. 3. He also laid down his life for our ransom. Heb. ix. 22.

4. The salvation itself, or the benefits that accrue to believers through Jesus Christ.

(1.) We are saved from the guilt of all our sins. Rom. viii. 1. Acts xiii. 39.

(2.) Believers are saved from the power of sin. Rom. vi. 6, 14.

(3.) Believers are saved from the contagion of sin. 1 John iii. 9. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 29.

(4.) They that are delivered from the body of sin and death, are saved, likewise, from fear; from all fear that hath torment. 1 John iv. 18. From the fear of man, of death. 1 Cor. xv. 55. From the fear of hell, or the wrath of God. Isa. xii. 1.

(5.) Believers are saved from the power of the grave. 1 Cor. xv. 53. Phil. iii. 21.

(6.) The saints shall be saved from hell and all misery. Rev. vii. 17. Ps. xvi. 11.

II. Who are they that neglect it?

It may appear superfluous to insist on this; but our proneness to deceive ourselves renders it necessary. Those who are guilty of this neglect:

1. Who live in any known sin.

2. Trust in their own righteousness. This argues an utter rejection of this salvation. Rom. x. 3.

3. Do not seek this salvation more than other objects. They who are not diligent in their business are said to neglect it.

III. Those who persist in the neglect of this salvation cannot escape punishment.

The interrogation in the text is the strongest possible negation. To hope for an escape is absurd. To effect it is impossible. The greater the salvation, the more grievous will be the damnation of those who neglect it. Luke xii. 47, 48.

1. In this life conscience condemns them; therefore, are they like the troubled sea. Isa. lvii. 20, 21. The wrath of God abideth on them, they are miserable. There is a curse on them, and on whatsoever they do. So that, even on earth, God often severely punishes those who abuse his mercy, who neglect his salvation.

2. At judgment, justice will seize upon them. Rev. vi. 15, 16, &c. Supposing those who neglect the great salvation could escape in this life, they cannot escape in the world to come. Rom. xiv. 12. Prov. ii. 22.

3. In hell the vengeance of God will still pursue them. Ps. ix. 17; xi. 6. Rev. xxi. 8.

Application:

1. It may be observed: How glorious is the gospel-scheme of salvation, how far superior to all those wonderful works and deliverances which God wrought in old times! Christ is our only refuge. Isa. xxxii. 2.

2. It is easy to see how heinous a thing sin is in the sight of God; how infinite and inconceivable the love of God is towards sinners. John iii. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

3. Consider the great, the glorious salvation, which is offered to you by the gospel. Seek it while it may be found. Isa. lv. 7. Heb. iii. 7, 8. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

4. Remember how it shall happen to all those who forget God. Rom. ii. 8, 9. They shall be punished both in time and in eternity. Ps. i. 22. Speedily give up all for Christ. Phil. iii. 8.

5. Though you may have neglected this great salvation to the present moment, God is willing and ready to pardon. Here is great salvation for great sinners. 1 Tim. i. 15. John vi. 37.

6. Never rest till you rest in Christ. Cry to God for a broken heart, Ps. li. 17, and he will not only heal your wounds, but cleanse your souls; and, at last, "present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Jude, verse 24.

THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us.—Rom. viii. 37.

GLORIOUS things are spoken, in the preceding part of this chapter, particularly from verse 28, concerning the love and goodness of God to his chosen people, in the co-operation of all things for their good; in contemplation whereof the apostle breaks out in proposing two questions full of comfort, verse 31. The first is, "What shall we say to these things?" How glorious are they! And the next is, "If God be for us," &c. We bid a defiance to all our opposers.

The words we have read relate not only to these, but especially to two other questions, that are both high notes of triumph and encouragement. The first is a question of triumph, &c. against all sin and guilt, "Who shall lay any thing?" &c. Verses 33, 34. The second is a question of triumph, &c. against all sorrows and afflictions, "Who shall separate us?" &c. Verses 35, 36. All these questions import a strong negation. "Who can be against us?"—"Who can charge us?"—"Who can condemn us?"—"Who can separate us?" Can men or devils do it? No, none can do it. But the apostle rests not in the negative, but proceeds to the positive determination of the point. "Nay," says he, "in all these things," &c.

In these words we have,

I. A victory proclaimed.

Therein it is asserted that believers are conquerors.

They are often called conquerors, victors, or overcomers. Rev. xxi. 7, &c.

The enemies they conquer are,

1. Sin. The guilt of which they conquer, by faith in Christ, at their justification, and the pollution by sanctification, verses 29, 30, &c.

2. The world. 1 John v. 4, 5.

3. The devil. James iv. 7.

4. Persecutions. Acts xiii. 10. These are overcome either by well doing or well suffering. 1 Pet. ii. 15. Rom. xii. 20, 21. Rev. xii. 11.

5. Afflictions, the context; these are overcome sometimes by prevention, and sometimes by cheerful submission, or profiting by them. Acts v. 41. 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

6. The last enemy they have to conquer is death. 1 Cor. xv. 26. And over this enemy believers shall also be victorious. Death shall not be able to separate, &c. 1 Cor. xv. 55. Hos. xiii. 14.

II. The nature and import of the conquest. It supposes and imports,

1. That they have got some saving acquaintance with the Captain of their salvation; have abandoned their own general, the devil, and deserted his camp; have enlisted themselves soldiers of Christ, in whom we see all the magazines of military provisions to carry us through this spiritual war. Col. i. 19.

2. The conqueror is one that resolves upon, and hath some acquaintance with, the warfaring life of the Christian. "I have fought the

good fight," &c. Those who follow Christ must be in the field, as well as on the mount.

3. The conqueror is acquainted with the nature of the war. The weapons of the warfare, &c. managed sometimes by flying, sometimes by fighting. 1 Cor. vi. 18; x. 14, &c. There are some things we cannot fly from; then fighting must take place. Eph. vi. 10—18.

4. The believing conquerors are those who know the ways and means of the victory, *i. e.* the spiritual armour, and the manner of using it.

(1.) The blood of Christ. Rev. xii. 11.

(2.) Faith. 1 Pet. v. 9.

(3.) The word. Eph. vi. 17.

(4.) Prayer. Matt. xxvi. 41.

III. Believers are more than conquerors. It is as if the apostle should say, "We overcome."

1. They are more than conquerors, inasmuch as their Captain, who fighteth for them, is more than man. Christ is their Captain, their Almighty General, and verse 31. We may say, 2 Kings vi. 16.

2. So far as they can glory in their cross. Gal. vi. 14. In tribulation, Acts v. 41.

3. As they conquer the greatest enemies in a little time, with little strength. For a great army to conquer a small one, it is a victory; but for a small army to conquer a great one, it is more than, &c.

4. As they can conquer without any loss to themselves, but rather gain. Rom. v. 3.

5. As they may be sure of victory before the war begins; for Christ their Head hath overcome already. Their weapons are invincible. The shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, &c. The promise of God is sure. Isa. liv. 17.

6. As far as they sometimes conquer when they do not fight; for the rest of God's people is glorious and victorious. Isa. xi. 10; Ex. xiv. 13, 14.

7. They conquer when they appear to be conquered. "In all these things," &c.

8. As they conquer and overcome themselves. He who can, through grace, conquer and overcome himself, is more than he that overcomes a castle. Prov. xvi. 32.

And, lastly, as they conquer him who is unconquerable, and overcome him who is invincible. Believers, to speak with holy reverence, do, in some respects, conquer even God himself, and that,

(1.) By the beauty of their graces. Song vi. 5, 9.

(2.) By the efficacy of their prayers. Isa. xlv. 11. Deut. ix. 14.

IV. The ground of their conquest. "Through him who hath loved us." This implies,

1. The humble frame of believers, through his strength and power. So we may say, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory," &c. 1 Cor. xv. 57.

2. It imports a suitable name and title given to Christ, the Captain of our salvation. Eph. v. 25. Gal. ii. 20. The apostle had been mentioning troubles and afflictions opposite to love; therefore, it was expedient to set forth Christ in his love.

3. It imports, that love was the spring that moved him to make us conquerors, and more, &c. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

4. Through him that loved us imports, that love is the principle of his assistance that he gives us in the war. Love did not only purchase the weapons at the price of blood, but love confers the weapons, and puts them on. It is he that enables us to carry on the victory to perfection, making the feeble to be as David; David as the angel of the Lord. There are three things he gives us, in love, for our assistance in the conquest over sin, affliction, &c.

(1.) His example. 1 Pet. ii. 21. Heb. xii. 2, 3.

(2.) His word. 2 Cor. ii. 14. 1 John ii. 14.

(3.) His Spirit. 1 John iv. 4. By the Spirit of Christ we are first overcome, and then are enabled to overcome.

5. It imports, that faith in his love carries us through, and makes us more than conquerors. We look to the banner of love, and are carried through. Love leads the way. Love fights the battle. Love carries the day. And under this banner, we are more than conquerors.

Inferences :

1. The Christian life is not only a wayfaring, but also a warfaring life. The conquest supposes a battle. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," &c. Part have scaled the New Jerusalem, and beckon to their brethren to fight on, &c.

2. That their victory proceeds not from themselves. "Not unto us," &c.

3. That the opposers of God's people take a hard task. "Saul, Saul," &c. Ps. ii. 9. Num. xxiii. 23. And, lastly, what an encouragement to enter under the banner of Christ! it is a banner of love, and we shall be more than conquerors.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT OFFENDED AT CHRIST.

And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.—Matt. xi. 6.

THESE words are the conclusion of Christ's answer to that question which John the Baptist propounded to him by two of his disciples, himself being in prison. The question is, verse 3. Christ returns this answer, verses 4, 5. Christ will be known by his works, verse 25. Works, such as were foretold the Messiah should perform. Isa. xxxv. 5. Christ is known by his word. The things you hear. He adds this consolation, "Blessed is he," &c.

I. Who are they that are offended at Christ?

1. The whole world. Matt. xviii. 7.

2. Not only the common people, but rulers, &c. Ps. ii. 1 Cor. ii. 8.

3. The carnal church. The Jews, who had the law of Moses, the prophets, &c.

4. Carnal ministers. Ps. cxviii. 22.

II. The things in Christ at which they are offended.

1. At Christ himself. Isa. liii. 2, 3.

(1.) At his mean appearance. John vi. 42.

(2.) The meanness of his condition. Matt. xiii. 54, 55.

(3.) There was no human or worldly greatness about him.

(4.) At the report concerning him : a sabbath-breaker, a blasphemer, a glutton, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, and that he had a devil. John x. 20.

(5.) Because of his shameful cross and sufferings. Herein lay the height and depth of the offence.

2. At his word.

(1.) Because it is the word of faith. Rom. x. 8, 9.

(2.) It exalts Christ, and debases the sinner. Eph. ii. 9.

(3.) It cannot be learned by human arts. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

(4.) It discovers the wickedness of the world.

(5.) There are so few who embrace it. Matt. vii. 14.

(6.) The true word of Christ, when it comes with the demonstration of the Spirit, brings trouble. Matt. x. 34.

3. At his true worship.

(1.) Because it is spiritual. John iv. 23.

(2.) It makes no outward show. Luke xvii. 20.

4. At the true church of Christ.

(1.) Because of their obedience to Christ.

(2.) God dwells in the midst of them. Isa. xii. 6.

(3.) They are not, in general, the great and honourable. Matt. xi. 25. 1 Cor. i. 26, 29.

5. At the government of his church.

(1.) That Christ will have none brought to his church by outward violence.

(2.) Doth nothing in his church by the secular arm.

(3.) In that we are to love our enemies. Matt v. 44.

(4.) All must be done by the law of love.

III. The evil of being thus offended at Christ.

1. To be offended at Christ is a certain evidence that we are ignorant of Christ and of God. John xvi. 3.

2. Those who are offended at Christ lose all the spiritual and eternal advantages that come by Christ to true believers : reconciliation, righteousness, &c.

3. They are utterly ruined through such offences. Ps. ii. 9. 1 Pet ii. 8. Matt. xxi. 44.

IV. The blessedness of those who are not offended at Christ.

1. In that it is evident they are all taught of God. John vi. 45.

2. It is an evidence that they have faith in him, and esteem him.

1 Pet. ii. 7.

Inferences :

1. If we are offended at the word of Christ, at his followers, or their sufferings, we are offended at Christ. John xvii. 14 ; xv. 18, 19.

2. That Christ and the gospel are never the worse for offences. Rom. i. 16.

3. Let us endeavour to cleave unto Christ, and conduct ourselves aright in the midst of offences.

CHRIST THE PROMISED MERCY.

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant.—Luke i. 72.

THIS scripture is part of Zechariah's prophecy, at the rising of that bright star, John, the harbinger and forerunner of Christ. They are some of the first words he spake after God loosed his tongue; which for a time, was struck dumb, for his unbelief. His tongue is now unbound, and at liberty to proclaim to all the world the riches of mercy through Christ, in a song of praise: Wherein we have,

The mercy celebrated, viz. Redemption by Christ, verse 68.

The description of Christ, by place and property, verse 69.

The faithfulness of God in our redemption in this way.

The benefit of being so redeemed by Christ, verse 71.

The exact accomplishment of all the promises made to the fathers, in sending Christ (the mercy promised,) into the world, verse 72. "To perform the mercy promised to our fathers," &c.

In these words we have,

I. A mercy freely promised.

Jesus Christ was the mercy promised to the fathers. The first promise of this mercy was made to our father Adam, Gen. iii. 15, and was frequently renewed afterwards, to Abraham, to David, and, as the text speaks, to the fathers, in their respective generations. Christ is styled a mercy.

1. Christ is the mercy, emphatically so called. He is an invaluable and matchless mercy, &c.

2. Christ is the mercy, because all the mercy of God to sinners is dispensed and conveyed through Christ. John i. 16. Eph. iv. 8.

3. Christ is the mercy, because all inferior mercies derive their nature, value, sweetness, duration, &c. from Christ. Eph. i. 3.

Christ is,

1. A free mercy. John iv. 10. Rom. v. 8. John iii. 16.

2. He is a full mercy. Col. i. 19.

3. He is a seasonable mercy. Rom. v. 6. Gal. iv. 4.

4. He is a necessary mercy, as bread to the hungry. John vi. 48. As water to the thirsty. John vii. 37. He is a ransom for the captives. Matt. xx. 28. A garment to the naked. Rom. xiii. 14. Nay, bread is not so necessary to the hungry, water to the thirsty, ransom to the captives, &c. as Christ to the sinner. The breath of our nostrils, the life of our souls, are in Christ.

5. Christ is a fountain of mercy. All other mercies flow through him. Zech. xiii. 1.

6. Christ is a satisfying mercy. 1 Cor. ii. 2.

7. He is a peculiar mercy: hence believers are a peculiar people. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

8. He is a suitable mercy. 1 Cor. i. 30.

Are we enemies? He is our reconciliation. Are we sold to sin and Satan? He is our redemption. Are we condemned by the law? He is

the Lord our Righteousness. Hath sin polluted us? He is the Fountain opened. Are we lost? He is the Way to the Father. Are we weary, &c.? He is our rest. Are we dead? He is the Resurrection and the Life. Are we dark? He is the Sun of Righteousness, the true light, &c. John i. 8.

9. He is an astonishing and wonderful mercy. Isa. ix. 6. His person is wonderful. 1 Tim. iii. 16. Wonderfully abased. Phil. ii. 6. And his love wonderful.

10. Christ is an incomparable mercy. Cant. ii. 3. Heb. ix. 26. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

11. Christ is an unsearchable mercy. Prov. xxx. 4. Eph. iii. 8.

12. He is an everlasting mercy. Heb. xiii. 8. Prov. viii. 18. John iv. 14.

II. The promised mercy faithfully performed.

The text.

1. Really and truly. Acts ii. 36. 1 John i. 1. Acts ii. 22.

2. As God did really and truly perform his promise, he performed it exactly according to the promises, types, and predictions, made of him to the fathers, &c.

(1.) As to his person and qualifications. As it was foretold, so it was fulfilled. Micah v. 2. Rev. i. 11. Matt. i. 21. The two natures united in one person was foretold, Zech. xiii. 7; fulfilled, Rom. ix. 5. His holiness foretold, Dan. ix. 24; fulfilled, John viii. 24. His offices were foretold, Deut. xviii. 15; performed, John v. 46. His priestly office foretold, Ps. cx. 4; performed, Heb. ix. 14. His kingly office, Isa. xxxii. 1; fulfilled, his enemies being judges, Matt. xxvii. 37.

(2.) As to his birth.

1.) The time. Gen. xlix. 10. Dan. ix. 24. Hag. ii. 7, 9. Mal. iii. 1. Luke ii. 38.

2.) The place. Mic. v. 2. Matt. ii. 5, 6. To be brought up at Nazareth. Zech. vi. 12. Matt. ii. 23.

3.) His parent, Isa. vii. 14; punctually fulfilled, Matt. i. 20, 23.

4.) His stock or tribe was foretold to be Judah, Gen. xlix. 10. Heb. vii. 14.

5.) His harbinger or forerunner foretold, Mal. iv. 5, 6; fulfilled, Luke i. 16, 17.

6.) The obscurity and meanness of his birth predicted, Isa. liii. 2; Zech. ix. 9; to which the event answered, Luke ii. 12.

3. His doctrine and miracles foretold, Isa. xxxv. 5, 6: the accomplishment is evident in the history of the Evangelists.

4. His death for us foretold, Dan. ix. 26; Isa. liii. 5; and so he was, John xi. 50, 51; the very kind and manner typified, John iii. 14.

5. His burial, Isa. liii. 9; accomplished, Matt. xxvii. 59, 60.

6. His resurrection, typified by Jonah. Matt. xii. 39.

7. The wonderful spreading of the gospel foretold, Isa. xlix. 6; to the truth whereof we are not only the witnesses, but the happy instances and examples: thus the mercy promised was faithfully performed.

Inferences:

1. Is Christ the promised mercy? What encouragement for sinners! John vi. 37. The vilest sinner may come; he upbraids none; he in-

vites all, John vii. 37 ; commands, Acts xvii. 30 ; he expostulates, Ezek. xviii. 31 ; he beseeches, 2 Cor. v. 20.

2. What a sin to reject this mercy !

3. Let us bless God for this mercy, that in and through Christ we may now draw near to God.

MAN HIS OWN DESTROYER, AND CHRIST HIS ONLY HELP.

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help.

Hosea xiii. 9.

ALL men are guilty and abominable before God ; and should he enter into judgment with them, no man living could be justified in his sight. Gal. iii. 10. Rom. iii. 9, 10. The text, "O Israel," &c.

I. All men have destroyed themselves by sin.

This is clear from the law and the prophets, as well as from our own observation and experience.

1. Adam destroyed himself, through rebellion and unbelief: and he did not fall and hurt himself alone ; Rom. v. 19 ; but we, his children and offspring, have all sinned in him.

2. We have likewise destroyed ourselves by actual sin. 1 John i. 10. Rom. iii. 23.

More particularly, man is in a ruined and wretched state, both as to his soul and body.

(1.) His understanding, originally a pure lamp of light, whereby he clearly saw his Father, knew his will, and understood the works of his Maker. How is this leading power of the soul destroyed ! Isa. i. 3. Jer. viii. 7. Eph. iv. 18.

(2.) His will, which at first was holy, conformed in all things to the will of his Creator. How is this faculty of the soul destroyed ! Jer. xvii. 9. Rom. viii. 7. He resists the motions, and admonitions of the Holy Spirit ; he fears not the threatenings, breaks the commandments, exalts his will against the will of God. Ex. v. 2. In short, sin hath transformed him into the image of the devil. John viii. 44.

(3.) His conscience is likewise defiled. This officer, during man's state of uprightness, presided as God's viceroy within, and admonished him continually ; but now it is, in many instances, past feeling. 1 Tim. iv. 2. So that men are so far from taking shame to themselves on the commission of evil, that they often glory in their sin. Phil. iii. 19.

(4.) His memory. This also hath shared in the general destruction. In the state of innocence, it was the treasury of the soul, full of the words of his God. Now, God is not in all his thoughts. Ps. x. 4. Rom. i. 28.

(5.) His passions and affections are equally depraved. Rom. i. 25. Phil. iii. 19. 1 John ii. 15. He does not delight himself in God, neither is the fear of the Lord before his eyes. He only hopes and fears evil or good below.

(6.) He has destroyed himself with respect to happiness. He has shut the gates of paradise against his own soul, and opened hell's infernal door.

(7.) As to the body. This likewise is, in the sense of the text, destroyed. It is subject to death and to pain, a tottering house, liable to numberless infirmities, and death itself.

II. Our only help and salvation is in Christ. "In Me is thy help."

It avails but little to discover our sin and misery, unless we find out a remedy to heal and help us. Rom. v. 18. The only way or means is Christ. Acts iv. 12. 1 Cor. i. 30.

1. Christ is the true light. Mal. iv. 2. John i. 9. He shines in our hearts; and sheds light through our understanding. Ps. xxxvi. 9.

2. He is the fountain of righteousness, to justify and sanctify us. Rom. v. 1. 1 Cor. vi. 11. 1 John i. 9.

3. He restores a good and enlightened conscience to us. Heb. x. 22. The soul is now sensible of the least transgression, it pants after universal obedience. 2 Cor. i. 12.

4. The help which we have in Christ hath its influence on the memory also. It is strengthened by grace, and made retentive of divine things. Rom. viii. 26.

5. Christ rectifies and restores our passions and affections. All the desires of the soul whom Christ thus helps are turned towards God. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

6. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all are made alive." Provision is made for the eternal life of every child of Adam that will come to Christ to receive it. John vi. 37. The bodies of the saints shall also be glorious. Phil. iii. 21.

7. In Christ is our help; as he delivers us from the wrath to come. Rev. xx. 6. John xiv. 3.

To conclude.

1. God does not say, O ye Gentiles, ye have destroyed yourselves; but, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself." As in old time, all were not Israel that were called Israel; neither now are all Christians that are called Christians. 2 Tim. iii. 5.

2. God saith, "Thou hast destroyed thyself." Man's damnation is of himself.

3. Although man hath destroyed himself, yet he cannot save himself. He has deserved damnation because of his sins; but he can never merit salvation by his righteousness. Rom. vi. 23.

4. God saith, "In Me is thy help." Doth not this reprove the self-righteous and the self-sufficient?

5. Every man, independent of Christ, is perfect helplessness, John xv. 5.

6. You who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, continue to hunger and thirst after righteousness, so shall you be unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight. Col. i. 22.

CHRIST THE DESTROYER OF EVERY ENEMY.

The Breaker is come up, &c.—Micah ii. 13.

WHATEVER respect these words may have, literally, unto the return of the children of Israel from the Babylonish captivity, through the instrumentality of Cyrus, it is generally agreed, not only by Christians, but even by some Jewish writers, that they have a principal and ultimate reference to the Messiah, and the great work of salvation that he was to accomplish in the fulness of time. The prophet tells us, in the preceding verse, that Christ, as the Great Shepherd, would gather together all the lost sheep of the house of Israel; and, by reason of the multitude of converts that should flock to the ever-blessed Shiloh, the noise and report of the gathering should be heard far and near. Reason might look on this as a thing altogether impracticable, because of the strong bars that stood in the way, and the great opposition that would be made by earth and hell to the gathering of this New Testament church. Therefore, the prophet here prophesies, that Christ should make the way, and a clear passage, and make mountains as a plain. "The Breaker is come up," &c.

Consider,

I. In what respects may Jesus Christ be called a Breaker.

1. He is so called, because of the great opposition he had to break through in the work of our redemption, both in the purchase and application thereof, &c.

2. Having bruised the head of the serpent, he breaks open his prison, and proclaims freedom and liberty to his prisoners. Isa. xlix. 24, 25. Zech. ix. 11.

3. He may be called the Breaker, because he breaks up a new and a living way, by which we may have access to God and glory. The old way, the covenant of works, was barred and blocked up, &c. Hence, John xiv. 6. Isa. xxxv. 8, 10.

4. Because he breaks the enmity of our hearts against him, and pulls down the strong-holds of iniquity, &c. The heart of man by nature, is like the scales of leviathan; proof against all but all-conquering grace, &c. Mark viii. 17.

5. Because of the breaking judgments he brings on the world in general, as war, &c.

6. Because of the breaking trials he often brings on his own people in this world. Job xvi. 14. Ps. xlv. 19; and li. 8.

7. In another point of view, as he breaks the power of temptation. Isa. lix. 19.

And, lastly, because those who will not bow to his royal authority, he breaks in pieces. Ps. ii. 9.

II. Consider in what respects he may be said to come up. "The Breaker is come up."

He comes up, like a mighty champion, to avenge the quarrel of his people. Isa. lix. 16, 17.

1. When our first parents sinned, he came up in the promise, Gen. iii. 15. Then in all the types, sacrifices, &c. of the Old Testament.

2. He came up really and personally in his incarnation, resurrection, &c.

3. In the chariots of a preached gospel. Matt. xxviii. 20.

4. In every display of his grace and love to such as believe, &c.

5. He may be said to come up seasonably, with alacrity and cheerfulness, speedily, courageously, and with much majesty, &c.

III. We are to inquire what may be implied in his coming up before them.

1. As the Shepherd of Israel, before the sheep of his pasture, to preserve and deliver them; which implies his love to them, and his tenderness over them. Isa. xl. 11. Ps. xxiii. 1.

2. As a general before his soldiers, to head them against the armies of the aliens. He was given for a Leader and Commander to the people: which imports,

(1.) That the way is difficult, and Christ comes as a Breaker: alluding to pioneers, &c. Rev. vii. 14. And he hath cleared the way, and left nothing behind him but a few light afflictions.

(2.) His right to command them. Hence he is called Jehovah-nisi. Ex. xvii. 15. As a general, he clothes, arms, and supplies all the wants of his soldiers, so that he is called Jehovah-jireh. Gen. xxii. 14.

3. As king before his subjects. "Their king shall pass before them." This imports strength. He is the mighty God: yea, Almighty. He rides in the heavens for the help of his Israel. Deut. xxxiii. 26. Isa. xl. 12.

4. He has come up before them. Which implies, that he has beaten the road, in obedience, in suffering, in going through death to glory. Heb. ii. 9.

5. It implies, that he hath routed their enemies: sin, the world, Satan, and death.

6. It imports, that the way to heaven is patent; there is no legal bar: but whatever difficulties they meet, they are yet safe. Isa. xli. 10. Ps. xxiii. 4.

IV. The escape of the ransomed by this way.

They have broken up, &c. out of darkness into light, out of bondage into liberty, &c.

They have passed through the gate, &c.

1. The law-gate of conviction.

2. The gospel-gate of conversion, or the new birth. They have gone out by it: now following the Breaker in the narrow way. Matt. vii. 13, 14.

Inferences:

1. Is Christ a Breaker? Shall the finally impenitent be broken with a rod of iron? What folly not to bow to his mercy!

2. What madness to oppose this Breaker! He has got a breaking arm, countenance, &c. Isa. lxii. 10.

3. Seeing that he hath broken up a new and living way to heaven, let us attend to him. Luke iv. 18, 19.

THE GOSPEL TRUMPET.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem.—Isa. xxvii. 13.

THIS chapter sets forth the happy state of the church in the last times, together with its fruitfulness, under the care and protection of the Lord. His affectionate regard for it. It points out its peace, prosperity, and flourishing condition; the ruin and destruction of its enemies. We are then informed of a great in-gathering of the people, ver. 13. However these words may refer to the Lord's gathering in of his people among the Jews, in the latter days, we shall find them equally applicable to his people in the present times.

Consider,

I. What are we to understand by the great trumpet.

With respect to the trumpet mentioned in the text, we are doubtless to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ; called a trumpet, in allusion to those which were ordained by Moses; Num. x. 2; which were emblematical of the gospel.

1. As to their make. The Lord commanded Moses to make them of one piece. Whence we may learn the true nature of the gospel of Christ, it is all of one uniform piece. 2 Cor. i. 18, 19.

2. As to their use. For the calling of the assembly; and of the same use also in the gospel of Christ.

3. As those trumpets were an emblem of the gospel, so were those who were appointed to blow them an emblem of gospel ministers. The priests were to blow them; Num. x. 8; none else were to do it. So none but those who are called, and qualified by the Lord, have any right to blow the gospel-trumpet. The trumpet in the text is called a great one. And which is also an emblem of the gospel of Christ.

(1.) Because of its author, the Great God. Rom. i. 1.

(2.) The effect of great love. 1 John iv. 10. John iii. 16.

(3.) The produce of great wisdom. 1 Cor. i. 24.

(4.) It proclaims great blessings. Rest to the weary. Matt. xi. 28. Pardon for the guilty. Acts xiii. 38, 39. Liberty for captives, health for the sick, sight for the blind, salvation for the lost. Luke xix. 10.

(5.) Attended with great power. Acts ii. 41.

(6.) Produces great effects on the mind. Acts xvii. 6.

II. "The great trumpet shall be blown."

It shall be blown, and that in spite of all opposition from Satan and all his servants. This gospel-trumpet has been blown,

1. By the prophets of old; all who, more or less, directed their hearers to Christ, who was to come, for pardon; Isa. liii. 25; for righteousness; Jer. xxiii. 6; for grace and glory; Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

2. By Christ. Matt. v. 4. Luke iv. 18.

3. By the apostles. Acts viii. 4.

4. This gospel-trumpet hath, and will be blown by all succeeding

ministers of the gospel, who are men of knowledge, strength, and courage: in consequence of which, they are not ashamed to blow it publicly. Rom. 1. 16. Acts xx. 20; xvii. 17.

5. It is blown musically; so as to make the hearts of those who hear it dance. Acts viii. 39; xvi. 34. Isa. xxxv. 6.

6. Successfully. Acts ii. 37, 41; xi. 19, 24.

III. The blessed effects.

1. They shall come which were ready to perish. All men by nature are in a perishing state: few are sensible of this: those who are enlightened by the Spirit of God see it. They shall come under a sense of their guilt, misery, &c. for pardon; 1 John i. 7; righteousness; 1 Cor. i. 30; peace; John xiv. 27; supplies of grace, &c. Phil. iv. 19.

2. They shall worship the Lord: join with his church and people, and partake of the blessings of the gospel. Isa. xxv. 9.

3. They shall at last be brought to glory. Rom. viii. 30. Isa. xxxv. 10.

Inferences:

1. How deplorable our state by nature! Outcasts from the favour and family of heaven, ready to perish.

2. What encouragement for sinners! 1 Tim. i. 15.

3. What cause of gratitude in believers! Ps. lxxxix. 15, 18.

CHRIST THE GREAT SUBJECT OF A GOSPEL MINISTRY.

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.—
Col. i. 28.

In the preceding verses St. Paul speaks of two things: First, That the gospel is “a mystery, hid, but now manifested to the saints of God,” verse 26. And secondly, That the Lord hath made known the glorious riches of this mystery among the gentiles, *i. e.* among other people as well as the Jews, verse 27, and this he farther confirms in the text. In the text we have the extent of St. Paul’s preaching, that he declared this divine word to all men; for, having intimated before, the subject of this great mystery of the gospel, and declared that it consisteth wholly in Christ Jesus, who is the author and matter of this celestial doctrine, he addeth, “Whom we preach,” &c. In these words we have,

1. The subject of St. Paul’s preaching, “Christ Jesus.”

St. Paul’s meaning is, that he not only makes mention of Jesus Christ to those he taught; but the apostle signifies that he declared Jesus Christ alone, preacheth none but him; that Jesus Christ is the only subject of his preaching, the filling up of his teachings according to his profession; 1 Cor. ii. 2; and his Epistles, in which he hath left us a true picture of his preaching, do sufficiently justify this declaration. For all who read these divine writings must acknowledge, that they are filled, from the beginning to the end, with Jesus Christ alone. This adora-

ble name shines with lustre through every page : there are scarcely two periods together in which it doth not appear. If he be to teach, he proposeth no other secrets, but those of the nature, the offices, the actions, the sufferings, or the promises of Jesus Christ. If he must combat error, he wields no other weapon but the cross of Christ. If he aims to clear obscurities, either of nature or the law, Jesus Christ alone is the light he useth to dissipate all shadows and clouds ; assuring us, that Jesus Christ is the end of the law, &c. Therefore, from him he fetcheth consolation for souls cast down, either by the sense of their sins, or the heaviness of their afflictions ; in him he finds all the motives and arguments for our sanctification.

Jesus Christ also furnished him with all that is necessary to pacify our consciences, to make glad our hearts, to confirm our faith, to inflame our love, to enkindle our zeal, to strengthen our constancy, to encourage our patience, to purify our affections, to loosen us from earth, and to lift us up to heaven.

Jesus Christ is all his logic and all his rhetoric : he is the ground of his arguments, the magazine of his arms, the great motive of his persuasions, and the soul of all his discourses. Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega, &c.

And, certainly, the apostle had good reason for all this ; for what is there, not only necessary and useful, or any way good or great, and excellent, which is not in Jesus Christ ? All arts, however excellent, in many respects, yet it is evident, that in comparison of Jesus Christ, they are miserable, poor, and childish. In him alone is found such true solidity as is able to content the soul ; in him alone is “ wisdom, righteousness, &c. all the fulness of the Godhead, all the treasures of wisdom ;” 1 Cor. i. 30 ; yea, in this Jesus alone are grace, truth, and life. Acts iv. 12.

II. The manner of St. Paul’s preaching : “ Warning (or admonishing) and teaching, in all wisdom.”

These are the two parts of the office of a good preacher, viz. admonition and instruction. The first compriseth all the remonstrances that are made to sinners, whether to reprehend their fault, or to excite their diligence ; to comfort their sorrows, or to exhort them to any other part of their duty. The second comprehendeth all the lessons of heavenly doctrine, and expositions of the mysteries of the kingdom. Admonition reformeth manners, teaching informeth faith. The one moveth the will and the affections, the other instructeth the understanding. The apostle declareth elsewhere, that he joineth these two together ; Acts xx. 21 : these two are joined throughout all his Epistles. He not only explaineth the mystery of faith, but frequently applieth the instructions to those he taught ; reproving, comforting, or encouraging, according to their circumstances : thus also he exhorteth, 2 Tim. iv. 2. Titus ii. 15.

These two offices are necessary for the edifying of the church, which is the end of the ministry ; and St. Paul declareth, 2 Tim. iii. 16.

This, then, is the duty of every preacher of the gospel ; to admonish for faults, warn of danger, &c. and teach the mysteries of the gospel ; the nature and offices of Christ, the relation in which believers stand to him, how they ought to walk worthy of their vocation, &c. in all

wisdom, divine wisdom ; warning faithfully, affectionately, constantly, &c.

III. The object of St. Paul's preaching : " Admonishing every man," &c. Col. i. 28.

The apostle was uniform in his preaching ; he preached the same Jesus to Jew and Gentile : in the same faithful manner to rich and poor, &c. God having given but one and the same gospel, as he hath set up but one sun in the universe to shine on all mankind. Gal. i. 8.

IV. The end of St. Paul's preaching.

The perfection of those to whom he preached. " That we may render every man perfect," &c. No creature can be absolutely and independently perfect, or so far perfect as not to be more perfect, or so as not to fall from that perfection. But St. Paul,

1. Exhorts to Christian perfection, Heb. vi. 1.

2. Prays for it, Eph. iii. 14—21. Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

3. Speaks for those who were perfect, Phil. iii. 15.

4. This is the end of preaching.

To conclude.

1. The perfection and the sufficiency of the doctrine preached by the apostles. Since the end is to make the hearer thereof perfect, it is evident that it had in it all that was necessary to convey this perfection ; and therein was the superiority of the gospel to the law.

2. That all who are Christ's disciples, or scholars, will be aiming at this perfection. There is but one sort of Christians, even such as have believed the gospel, who " mortify the deeds of the body," &c. Rom. viii. 13. Those who would be both worldlings and Christians, disciples of heaven and earth, have no more being, in reality, in nature, than in the scriptures of God. If we would be Christians in deed and in truth, let us aim at this perfection : " Walk as Christ also walked." Gal. vi. 16.

THE

TENDER EXPOSTULATION OF HEAVEN.

Why will ye die?—Ezek. xviii. 31.

How can we without a melting heart, see and hear those compassionate words of the good God, saying to us, " Why will ye die, O house of Israel ?" The house of Israel was the church of God, the company of those who had the book of God, the covenant and ordinances of God among them, and yet God asks them, " Why will ye die," and be lost for ever ? Supposing him asking us the same question, you professed Christians, you that now belong to the Israel of God, " Why will ye die ?" Why will ye sin on, and refuse mercy and peace, and run yourselves wilfully unto eternal death and damnation ?

Consider and meditate on the extent and importance of this question. How many more are contained in the bowels of it, or may be drawn suitable thereto ! Many serious and weighty questions we may ask ourselves upon every word of the question in the text. As,

I. "Why will ye die?"

1. Why will you continue spiritually dead ; dead in your guilt, ignorance, unbelief, hardness of heart ; dead to God, to religion, the ways of God, to heaven ? Is there no such thing as communion with God ? as having the conversation in heaven, a better country ? Why continue dead to all this ?

2. Why will you refuse the Author of life ? Why put him to complain ? John v. 40.

3. Why do you reject and refuse the way of life, the good way that will bring you to eternal life, John xiv. 6, and the path he hath made known ?

4. Why will you embitter your own death ? What a terrible death will you die, if you die in your sins ! Mark ix. 43, 44.

5. Why will you venture on eternal death ? Rom. vi. 23.

II. "Why will *you* die?"

1. You, who are such noble, rational creatures ; you, who are the first-born of the creation ; Job xxxv. 11 ; you, who have immortality written on your minds and consciences.

2. You, who are put in the Redeemer's hand.

3. You, who have a Bible, the book of God, put into your hand.

4. You, who have life so freely and frankly offered. Isa. lv. 1, 2.

5. You, who have a Saviour standing and knocking at your doors. Rev. iii. 20.

6. You, who have the Spirit striving with you. 1 Thess. v. 19.

7. You, who have the ministers of God's word.

8. You, who have the Lord urging the case with you. "Why will you die?"

9. You, who live within the compass of the Christian church. Heb. xi. 40.

10. You, who dwell in the purer part of the house of Israel ; you who belong to Judah rather than apostatized Israel.

11. You, who live in the land of Great Britain, "Why will you die?" who live in this happy isle ?

III. "*Why will you die ?*"

1. Are you resolved that the blessed God shall have no more glory in your salvation ? Luke xv. 32.

2. Are you resolved that the Redeemer shall have no honour or satisfaction in you, or praise from you ? Rev. i. 5, 6. Isa. liii. 11.

3. That the holy angels shall have no joy or comfort in you ? Luke xv. 10.

4. Do you design that the devil and damned spirits shall have your company for ever ? Matt. xxv. 41.

5. Is it not enough in your eyes, that angels have sinned and died, but you must die also ? 2 Pet. ii. 4.

6. Is it not enough that your first parents died, but you must die too ?

7. Is it not enough that the old world died, but you must die too ? Gen. vi. 11—13. That Sodom and Gomorrah died, &c. but you must die also ? Gen. xix. 24. 2 Pet. ii. 5, 6.

8. Is it not enough that the old house of Israel generally died, but you must also die ? The prophets complained, Isa. liii. 1.

9. Are the numbers to be saved so great, that you will be one of that number?

10. Is heaven and life so dreadful a state, that you are resolved you will not come thither? Is death and hell so happy a state, that none but that will serve you?

11. Is the misery of the heathen world so small, that you are resolved yours shall be greater? Matt. xi. 20—24.

12. Are you such enemies to yourselves that you are resolved to die, whatever is the consequence? Is it not enough to die once, but you will die twice? Rev. xxi. 8.

13. Have you a mind to try by experience what this death is? and to defeat the Redeemer's design in going to prepare places above for such as you? John xix. 3.

And, lastly, are you resolved to glorify no other attribute of God but his wrath and vengeance? Is this life hastening to an end? Is death approaching apace? Is the Judge at the door? Must you, in a few days, be either in heaven or hell? among the blessed or the damned? And yet will ye not think of these things? "Why will ye die?"

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST ANNOUNCED BY AN ANGEL.

And there were, in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.—Luke ii. 8—11.

It appears that the time of this important birth was at that season of the year when shepherds were wont to be abroad and watch their sheep all night; some of which were then in the fields near Bethlehem: "And there were then in the same country shepherds," &c.

Consider,

I. The appearance of the angels to the shepherds, with the circumstances the history remarks.

1. This meeting of the angels with the shepherds was not accidental, but by the order of Providence.

(1.) God causes his grace to descend, not only upon the great and powerful of the world, but also upon the most simple and inconsiderate; just as the heavens diffuse their influence, not only on great trees, but also on the most inconsiderable herbs. 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

2. It seems as if God took more pleasure in bestowing his favours on the most abject, than in distributing them among persons of elevated rank. Matt. xi. 25. Here is an example: for, while God sent the wise-men of the East to Herod, he sent an angel of heaven to the shepherds, and conducted them to the Saviour of the world.

3. In this meeting of the angels and shepherds, we see a perpetual character of the economy of Jesus Christ; wherein the highest and most sublime things are joined with the meanest and lowest. In his person, the Eternal Word is joined to a creature, the Divine nature to the hu-

man, Infinity to infirmity, the Lord of glory to flesh and blood. In his baptism he is plunged in the water, and the Father speaks to him from heaven; he is under the hand of John, and the Holy Ghost descends upon him. In his temptations the devil tempts him, angels obey him; on his cross naked, at the same time shaking the earth and eclipsing the sun. Here, in like manner, an angel converses with the shepherds; an angel marks his majesty, shepherds his humility; an angel, because he is the Creator; shepherds, because "he made himself of no reputation." Phil. ii. 7.

4. This mission of the angels to shepherds, relates to the end for which the Son of God came into the world; to establish a communion between God and men, to make peace between men and angels: to this St. Paul refers, Col. i. 20. Observe,

(1.) While these shepherds were busy in their calling, God sent his angel to them. However simple our employment may be, it is pleasing to God to discharge it with a good conscience. Ex. iii. 1, 2.

(2.) God doth, in regard to men, what these shepherds did in regard to their sheep. Isa. xl. 11. Ps. xxiii. 1. Thus we should remember what we are in our vocation; God is to us from a Prince to a Shepherd.

(3.) The "glory of the Lord shone round about" the shepherds.

1. When angels borrow human forms to appear to men, (as it is likely this angel did when he appeared to the shepherds,) they have always appeared with some ensigns of grandeur; Matt. xxviii. 3; Acts i. 10; and here the light shone.

1. The appearance of this angel to the shepherds in the night may be very well taken for a mystical symbol. Night represents the corrupt state of mankind when Jesus Christ came: a state of ignorance and error, depravity and misery, are aptly signified by the darkness of the night; and light fitly represents the grace of Jesus Christ. John viii. 12.

3. The angel appeared in glory to the shepherds, when they neither expected nor thought of such a favour. God often bestows greater favours on us than we expected. Jesus Christ was given when men were not thinking of him.

The text says, "They were sore afraid."

1. This was the effect of their great surprise. Rev. i. 17. "He fell as dead."

2. Arises from emotions of conscience. Man is a sinner, and consequently the object of justice; when, therefore, any thing extraordinary and divine appears to him, he necessarily trembles. Gen. iii. 10; Judges xiii. 22.

3. The shepherds had just reason to fear, when they saw before them an angel from heaven, surrounded with the ensigns of majesty. Angels had formerly been the ministers of God's vengeance. Ex. xii. 29; 2 Chron. xxxii. 21; therefore might the shepherds fear. But God's thoughts are not as our thoughts. The angel said, "Fear not," verse 10. Agreeable surprise! How different to those who are saying, "Peace, peace," &c.

II. The angel's discourse to the shepherds.

1. The angel says to them, "Fear not," &c. Fear chills the spirits, enervates the soul, and envelopes the understanding in midnight gloom;

incapacitates us both for action and thought. To recover the shepherds from this stupefaction, the angel begins with "Fear not."

Then announces to the shepherds the great and mysterious news of the Redeemer's birth, verses 10, 11, "Behold." This is generally used in scripture to denote the greatness and importance of the subject in question, and to gain attention. The prophets had used it. Isa. vii. 14. Zech. ix. 9. Mal. iii. 1.

(1.) The angel's description of the person of whom he speaks, "A Saviour, Christ, the Lord." A Saviour, Matt. i. 21. Christ Anointed, Prophet, Priest, and King, the Lord, the eternal Jehovah. The Lord comes to overthrow the tyrannical empire of the devil, and to establish his natural and lawful dominion amongst men. True, Lord, if we regard the extent of his empire, from sea to sea; true, Lord, if we regard the power by which he governs; Dan. iv. 35; true, Lord, if we consider the end of his reign, which is grace, peace, &c.

By this the angel intended to give the shepherds primarily an idea of the benefits which they might expect of the Messiah; and, for this reason, began with the title Saviour, in order to affect them with their own interest: this Saviour is "Christ the Lord." The angel calls him Saviour, to justify that "great joy which," says he, "I bring you." He calls him Christ, the Messiah, with reference to the place, "the city of David." The Lord, to account for an angel coming with the tidings: the Lord, both yours and ours.

The angel calls him "a Saviour, Christ the Lord," to guard the shepherds against being offended at what he was about to tell them, verse 12.

2. This "Saviour, Christ the Lord, is born unto you."

Observe,

1. That the Son of God, out of pure love to us, became the Son of Man. John i. 14. Gal. iv. 4, 5. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

2. The Son of God was not only pleased to take our nature, but he even condescended to suffer all the weakness of infancy.

(1.) That he might have a perfect conformity to the rest of mankind.

(2.) That the ancient predictions might be accomplished. Gen. iii. 15; xii. 3. Isa. ix. 6.

(3.) The Messiah was not born for himself. "To you is born." Isa. ix. 6.

(4.) The angel doth not say, He is born for us, but "you," Heb. ii. 16.

The angel expressly mentions the place of Christ's birth, verse 11; according to the prophecy, Micah v. 2.

The quality of this great news, verse 10. What could be so great cause of joy? Here is "a Saviour, Christ the Lord," and he is born for us; we have an interest in him above angels. He hath testified his love to us by submitting to sinless infirmity.

What a contrast between his first and second coming! 1 Thess. iv. 16.

THE HAPPINESS OF CHRIST,

ANTECEDENT TO HIS INCARNATION.

Then was I by him, as one brought up with him : and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.—Prov. viii. 30.

By wisdom, in this book, Solomon intends two things: First, grace, or holiness. Prov. iv. 7. Secondly, Jesus Christ, the Fountain of that grace. The former is renowned for its excellency; Job xxviii. 12—15; so the latter, in this context.

The delights between the Father and the Son, before his assumption of our nature, were two-fold.

1. The Father and the Son delighted in one another, (from which delights the Spirit is here excluded,) without communicating their joys to any other: for no creature did then exist, save in the mind of God, verse 30.

2. They delighted in the salvation of men; in the prospect of that work, though not yet extant, verse 31.

In these words consider,

1. The glorious condition of the non-incarnated Son of God, “Then was I by him,” or with him, John i. 2—18.

2. “As one brought up with him,” John i. 3.

3. Was always the “Father’s delight, rejoicing always before him,” without any interruption.

The condition and state of Jesus Christ before his incarnation, was a state of the highest and most unspeakable delight and pleasure, in the enjoyment of his Father. John xiii. 3; xiv. 16. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Phil. ii. 7. John xvii. 5. Isa. xlii. 1. Consider,

I. Negatively.

1. He was not abased to the low estate of a creature, Phil. ii. 7, nor appeared in the “likeness of sinful flesh.” Rom. viii. 3.

2. Was not under the law in this estate. Gal. iv. 4.

3. Not liable to any of those sorrowful consequents and attendants of that frail and feeble state of humanity which afterwards he assumed with that nature. As,

1. He was unacquainted with griefs; which he was, after he became man, acquainted with. Isa. liii. 4.

2. He was never pinched with poverty and want, as after he became man. Matt. viii. 20.

3. He never underwent reproach and shame, in the bosom of his Father. Isa. liii. 4. Ps. xxii. 6.

4. His holy heart was never offended with any impure suggestions, or temptations of the devil, while he lay in the bosom of his Father. Matt. iv. 1. Heb. iv. 15.

5. He was never sensible of tortures nor pains, in soul or body. Isa. liii. 5.

6. There were no hidings nor withdrawals of his Father from him. Matt. xxvii. 46.

7. There were never any impressions of his Father's wrath upon him. Matt. xxvi. 38.

8. There was no death to which he was subject in that bosom. But, II. Positively.

1. It was a state of matchless happiness. John i. 1. Ps. xvi. 11.

2. A state of intimacy, dearness, and oneness with his Father. John x. 30.

3. It was a state of pure, unmixed, and ravishing delight, with which the Father and the Son embraced each other.

4. It was a constant, perpetual, and uninterrupted delight, verse 23.

III. Comparatively; and the delight will appear glorious that the Father and the Son had with each other.

1. Compare it with the delights that some creatures take in each other, and you will find that they infinitely fall short of this. Gen. xlv. 30. 1 Sam. xviii. 1. Deut. xiii. 6.

2. Compare it with the delight that God takes in some of his creatures; you will find it to come short of the delights that God takes in Christ. Zeph. iii. 17. Isa. lxii. 5. Eph. i. 6.

3. Compare it with the delights that the best of creatures take in God and Christ; how infinitely short it comes of the delights that God takes in Christ! Ps. lxxiii. 25.

To conclude.

1. What an astonishing love was this, for the Father to give the delight, the darling of his soul, out of his very bosom, for poor sinners! John iii. 16, 17, 19. 1 John iv. 10.

2. Adore, and be for ever astonished at the love of Jesus Christ to poor sinners, that ever he should consent to leave such a bosom.

3. Let us be informed, that an interest in Jesus Christ is the true way to all spiritual preferment in heaven. Eph. i. 6; and ii. 6.

4. How worthy is Jesus Christ of all love and delight, seeing how infinitely the Father delighteth in him! John xii. 32. He that left the Father's bosom for us, ought to be received by us. Eph. iii. 17. Col. i. 22.

5. If Christ be the beloved darling of his Father's soul, what a grievous, insufferable thing is it to the heart of God, to see his dear Son despised, slighted, and rejected by sinners! Heb. x. 29. Matt. xxi. 37—40. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

6. If Christ lay eternally in the bosom of his Father's love, and yet was content to leave it for our sakes, let us be ready to forsake and leave all for Christ. Luke xviii. 28.

And, lastly, let this encourage thy heart, O believer! in a dying hour, that thou art going to the bosom of love, whence Christ came. John xvii. 5—14.

THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES,

THE CAUSE OF GREAT SURPRISE AND JOY.

Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?

Isa. lx. 8.

IN the last verse of the preceding chapter, God had made a promise of the continuance of the church on earth to the last ages of time; and, in the beginning of this chapter, we have a promise of the enlargement of the church, under the New Testament, to the utmost boundaries of the earth, verses 3, 4. We are informed, also, how the church shall be affected with this increase of her members, and enlargement of her borders; she shall be in a transport of joy, verse 5. There shall be a mixture of fear with this joy: "Thine heart shall fear;" as though it were a thing unlawful to join with the gentiles. That her heart shall be enlarged with love, so as to have room for all the gentile converts; she shall be struck with surprise and wonder: "Who are these?" &c.

Consider,

I. What is implied in the sinner's flight to Christ.

1. This flight supposes that some spiritual life and sensation is given to the sinner; for there can be no flying without life. The sinner is, by nature, legally and spiritually dead. Eph. ii. 1.

2. An apprehension and fear of danger from a pursuing enemy. The poor soul is made to see danger from the broken law, from the sword of justice, the avenger of blood. Heb. vi. 18.

3. Implies a renunciation of relief from every other refuge. Hos. xiv. 3.

4. A discovery of the suitableness and sufficiency of Christ to save them.

5. A hearty approbation of Christ. 1 Tim. i. 15.

6. A firm and true confidence in the all-sufficiency of his merits and the mercy of God. Acts xv. 11.

II. Speak a little of the manner; and this is held forth in a two-fold metaphor.

1. As a cloud.

(1.) For multitude. Heb. xii. 1. Many particles of water in a cloud; many converts under the gospel. Isa. liv. 1. Rev. vii. 9.

(2.) They fly as a cloud. It may imply the unanimity of these converts; clouds all fly one way. Isa. xlv. 22.

(3.) The drops of water in a cloud are collected by the rays of the sun, and kept in the air by the power of God; so sinners, by the Sun of righteousness, &c. Deut. xxxiii. 3. John x. 28. 1 Pet. i. 5.

(4.) Although clouds have a dark aspect to the eye, yet they have a blessing in them; so the lips of the righteous feed many. Mic. v. 7.

2. They are said to fly as doves.

(1.) A dove is a simple creature. Believers exhorted. 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2.

(2.) Harmless. Matt. x. 16.

(3.) Mournful. Ezek. ix. 4.

(4.) The flight of the dove is very swift; so the flight of the believer. Isa. xl. 31.

III. The windows to which the believer flies.

Windows suppose a house. The Lord, in mercy, hath provided a house; Prov. ix. 1, 2; and the windows of this house are set open for God's doves to fly in at. Now, these windows are many.

1. There is the secret window of meditation. Isa. xxvi. 8, 9; Ps. lxiii. 5—7.

2. Of secret prayer; and to this the Lord invites them. Cant. ii. 14; Matt. vi. 6.

3. Of praise. Ps. ciii. 1—3.

4. Reading the scripture. Jer. xv. 16. John v. 39. Ps. xix. 7.

5. Christian conversation. Mal. iii. 16.

6. The preaching of the gospel, and all the ordinances of God's house.

IV. This is a pleasant and a surprising sight.

1. It is pleasant to God, Luke xv. 32, to angels, Luke xv. 10, to true believers. For,

(1.) The promises are fulfilling. Isa. xi. 10.

(2.) It is the travail of Christ's soul. Isa. liii. 11.

(3.) The day of espousals. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

(4.) Of release to captives. Isa. xlix. 25.

And, lastly, because the head of the old serpent gets a new bruise.

2. It is surprising,

(1.) When we consider the state they were in.

(2.) The oppositions that were in the way, from sin, Satan, and the world.

Inferences :

1. The great use of gospel-ordinances. Ps. lxxxiv. 1—10.

2. The folly of those who have been long flying about the windows, but never enter into the house.

3. The use of the law to alarm, and the gospel to invite.

Have we ever been surprised by a thunder-clap from mount Sinai?

Are we now flying to Christ by these windows?

He commands you, invites you, entreats and beseeches you : he expostulates with you, he assures you of welcome : all things in his house are ready.

Consider, then, what is behind you; the roaring lion, the curse of the broken law, the wrath of God : and there is salvation in no other. Oh, then, fly ! or you lose your souls for ever. Jonah i. 6. Gen. xix. 17.

GOD REQUIRES THE HEART.

My son, give me thine heart.—Prov. xxiii. 26.

THERE have been such noble and generous spirits in some of the people of God, that they have been frequent in such inquiries as these : "What shall we render the Lord for all his mercies? and, what shall we return him for all his goodness?" Ps. cxvi. 12. And he, in the prophet Micah, though he be of a different temper from these, yet seemeth to be very solicitous and desirous to know what he should bring unto the

Lord. Micah vi. 6. The Lord requires our hearts : “ My son, give me thine heart.”

These words are spoken by Solomon, but not in his own name ; it had been too much for Solomon to have asked it for himself. It doth not become the mouth of any creature to ask the heart to itself ; but Solomon speaks it in the name of Wisdom, and so in the name of God himself, the “ eternal fountain of wisdom.” It is He that calls unto the sons of men, and bids them give him up their hearts.

Now, as in proverbial speeches there useth to be, so it is here ; there is abundance of rich variety, a great deal of treasure locked up in a few words.

I. For their relation, “ My son.”

1. He speaks here, and not to a stranger, to a son. Eph. ii. 19.
2. A son, not an enemy. Col. i. 21. Rom. v. 10.
3. A son, not a slave. Luke iv. 18. Rom. vi. 18.
4. A son ; thou wert not always so ; Eph. ii. 1—4, 13. 1 John iii. 2 ; “ Now are we the sons of God.”
5. A son ; therefore, in a way of gratitude and mutual affection, thou art to give thy heart to thy Father.

II. The manner of yielding up the heart to God. It is here expressed by a way of giving.

1. Give it cheerfully. 2 Cor. ix. 7.
2. Presently. 2 Cor. vi. 2. Heb. iv. 7.
3. Give it, do not lend it only. Many lend their hearts under a sermon, like those, Ezek. xxxiii. 32.
4. Give it, do not sell it. John vi. 26.
5. Give thine heart, do not keep it thyself. Prov. iii. 5. Give it to the Lord, and thou shalt be kept by him. 1 Pet. i. 5.
6. Give it. God is pleased to call that a gift which indeed is a debt. Rom. viii. 12 ; xii. 1.

III. To whom the heart must be given.

1. Not to the creature. Matt. x. 37.
2. Not to the world. 2 Tim. iv. 10. 1 John ii. 15.
3. Not to Satan. Eph. ii. 2.
4. Not to sin. Prov. i. 10.
5. Give it to him who gave himself for thee. Gal. ii. 20.

IV. The gift itself, “ the heart.”

1. Not the outward man only, not the body only ; God dwells not so much in these temples, as in broken and contrite spirits. He doth not here ask for the shell, but the kernel ; not for the casket, but for the jewel. Give him the kernel, the jewel, the heart : “ Give me thine heart.” Not thine ear only, the ear must be inclined, as the door to the heart ; not thy tongue only ; Matt. xv. 7, 8 ; not thine head only, but “ thine heart.”

2. Not in appearance, but in reality.

3. Not a part, but the whole. God is like the true mother. 1 Kings iii. 26.

4. Give thine heart ; *i. e.* all the powers and faculties of thy soul. The understanding, to know him more fully, as wax to the seal ; the will to be subject to him, the affections, to delight in him, the confidence to trust in him. Ps. ii. 12. Prov. xxviii. 26.

To conclude :

1. Because it is his due. He is the maker, the purchaser, 1 Cor. vi. 20, the spouse. Hosea ii. 19.

2. It is pleasing and acceptable to him. He asks it, it is all thou canst give him ; it is a comprehensive gift. He that gives the heart, will give all things. Rom. viii. 32.

3. All performances without the heart will be rejected. Amos v. 21, 22.

4. Give thine heart to God ; if it be a hard heart, he will make it new. Deut. xxx. 6. Ezek. xxxvi. 26.

THE THRONE OF GOD,

FOUNDED ON JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT.

Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.—Ps. lxxxix. 14.

THIS psalm elegantly describes God's covenant of grace made with Christ, and his spiritual seed in him, under the type of God's covenant of royalty with David and his posterity ; as is plain from many passages in the psalm, which are too sublime and lofty to be restrained unto David's temporary reign, or that of his posterity, over the tribes of Israel, which quite expired in the revolution of a few ages.

The words read are a description of the nature of the Messiah's kingdom and administration : "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." Compare Ps. xlv. 6. Heb. i. 8. The throne of Christ is three-fold. The throne of glory, *i. e.* the essential glory and majesty of the divine nature ; this throne is not accessible by finite creatures. 1 Tim. vi. 16. A throne of justice : at this throne every unbeliever is condemned. Ps. cxxx. 3. A throne of grace. Heb. iv. 16. It is this throne which is intended in the text, as appears from the text and following context.

I. Speak a little of this throne.

1. By this throne of grace we may understand God manifesting himself in our nature, and dealing with sinners according to the grace of the gospel ; set forth, 2 Cor. v. 19—21 ; issuing out a word of peace and good-will towards men, that they may draw near to him. God manifesting himself this way to guilty sinners, may be called a throne,

(1.) With allusion to the mercy-seat in the temple of Jerusalem ; Israel was a theocracy, the Holy One of Israel was their King, and the mercy-seat was his throne, which was a type of Christ. Ps. lxxx. 1. So God is in Christ. Col. ii. 9. God meets and communes with us, as he did from the mercy-seat. Ex. xxv. 17—22. Or,

(2.) It may be called a throne, because of the glorious greatness and royal majesty that shine forth in the administration of grace through Christ. Ps. cxcix. 1.

1.) There is a royal majesty in the name of Him that sits on the throne, "King of kings, Wonderful, Counsellor," &c. 1 Tim. vi. 15.

2.) In his looks. "Honour and majesty are before his face ; his countenance is as Lebanon as the sun shining in his strength" Rev. i. 16.

3.) In his words; and all that know them will be ready to say, verse 15, &c. "The voice of the Lord, (even from a throne of grace,) is powerful, full of majesty; it makes the dead to live, the dumb to sing, and the lame man to leap as an hart:" and no wonder, for it is "spirit and life." Christ speaks but a word to Mary, viz. "Mary," and her heart dances with joy; and she cries "Rabboni, my Master." John xx. 16.

4.) In his vesture. Rev. i. 13. Isa. vi. 1. Cant. iv. 11.

5.) In his sceptre, Ps. xlv. 6, called the "rod of his strength." Ps. cx. 2.

6.) In the acts that are passed, Isa. xliii. 25, and in the heralds who are sent to proclaim it.

7.) In the attributes and revenues of this throne, *i. e.* of glory and praise. Isa. xxiv. 16. Ps. lxxii. 17—19. Rev. iv. 10; v. 8—12.

8.) In the gifts and distributions, which are worthy of the giver. He gives himself: "I will be thy God." He gives his Son, John iii. 16, his Spirit, Luke xi. 13, his grace and glory, Ps. lxxxiv. 11, and all this freely. Isa. lv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17.

(3.) Because of the comfortable views that are to be had of God by guilty, trembling sinners; they see him as inviting sinners to draw near.

1.) God is to be seen as a God of love. 1 John iv. 10—16.

2.) As a God of peace. Heb. xiii. 20. Isa. xxvii. 4, 5.

3.) As a God with us. Isa. vii. 14. Ps. xlyi. 7.

4.) As a prayer-hearing God.

And, lastly, as our God. Gen. xvii. 7. So that we may say with Thomas, John xx. 28; and this throne is the "throne of God and of the Lamb." Rev. vii. 10.

II. Its basis or foundation. It is laid in justice satisfied, and judgment executed on the Son of God.

1. When God created man, he entered into a covenant with him; man, by breaking that covenant, incurred the penalty.

2. The Lord, in mercy, admitted of a surety, and provided one, even his eternal Son. Isa. xxviii. 16.

3. The Son of God, in consequence of his undertaking, as our surety, a cry was made in heaven by justice, "Awake, O sword," &c. Zech. xiii. 7.

4. Whatever justice demanded of the surety, was executed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Did it demand sin to be punished in our nature? "The Word was made flesh." Did it demand perfect obedience? "He fulfilled all righteousness." Matt. iii. 15.

5. Justice being satisfied, and the law magnified, God thereupon raises up this throne of grace, and proclaims himself, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious;" and accordingly passes acts of grace from this throne. Heb. viii. 10—12.

Notice some of the properties, or qualities, of the foundation of this throne.

1. It is an ancient foundation. Prov. viii. 23.

2. It is a foundation of God's own laying, Isa. xxviii. 16.

3. It is a firm foundation. Christ is called a rock. Matt. xvi. 18.

4. It is a tried foundation: justice tried it, and found it firm. The

powers of hell tried to overturn this foundation, but their kingdom and power were broken in the enterprise; the little stone cut out of the mountain broke the head of the great Goliath. All the saints have tried this foundation, and proclaimed it sufficient to bear their weight. Heb. vii. 25.

5. A precious foundation. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.

6. A beautiful foundation. What the Lord says of his church, Isa. liv. 11, is much more true of the throne of grace. There is such a beauty in this foundation, that it reflects a beauty on all who approach it.

7. A perpetual foundation. It is everlasting. Ps. lxxii. 17; cx. 4.

III. Inquire why the Lord will have justice and judgment for the foundation of the throne of grace.

And here we need not multiply reasons, but only mention one, which we have, "That grace might reign through righteousness." Rom. v. 21. That grace might be displayed in consistency with justice: that God might be "just, and the justifier of the ungodly." Grace reigns,

1. In the contrivance of this righteousness.

2. In the acceptance of it at the hands of the surety instead of the sinner.

3. In the execution. Gal. iv. 4.

4. In the revelation. It is not only contrived and wrought out, but proclaimed also. Mark xvi. 15.

5. In the bringing near this righteousness. It is not only revealed in general, but the Lord brings it near to the sinner. Isa. xli. 12, 13.

6. In the imputation of this righteousness to the believer. 2 Cor. v. 21. Jer. xxiii. 6.

7. In the soul's acceptance of it. "Surely in the Lord only have I righteousness and strength." Isa. xlv. 24.

To conclude:

1. We see the expense of a throne of grace.

2. What encouragement for the worst of sinners!

3. What a glorious dispensation is the gospel! 2 Cor. iii. 7—11.

4. See the infinite value of the blood of Christ. By this blood God is reconciled, the curse of the law abolished, and the hand-writing, &c. nailed to the cross. Col. ii. 14.

And, lastly, it is our duty and privilege to draw near to the throne of grace, before we are called to the throne of his justice.

HYPOCRISY, A MOST HEINOUS INIQUITY.

Beware of the leaven of the pharisees, which is hypocrisy.—Luke xii. 1.

It is not unusual to find such things as are very different from each other, sometimes compared to the same thing; either because this same thing may have several qualities answering to those in different things; or else, because the things that otherwise greatly differ from each other, may yet possibly have some one thing equally common among them—

selves. On this account we find the very kingdom of God (that is, the gospel of our Lord; which is the doctrine of that kingdom) compared to *leaven* in the scriptures; so we find it, Luke xiii. 20, 21. The gospel is compared to *leaven*, because, as a little lump of this spreads itself through the whole mass, wherewith it is mingled, so did the gospel of our Lord (as it is here foretold it should) propagate and diffuse itself, from small beginnings amongst the Jews, far and wide through other nations.

On the other hand, we also find, that the doctrine and hypocrisy of the pharisees are, by our Lord, compared to *leaven*; not only as apt to spread and diffuse themselves, as that doth, but also as swelling the minds of men with pride and bitterness, as that sours and swells the lump it is mixed with; insomuch, that the prohibition of *leaven* in the paschal feast was made a symbol, in the law, of the mortification of those vices. This the apostle alludes to, 1 Cor. v. 8.

The doctrine of the pharisees is styled *leaven*, Matt. xvi. 6, and their hypocrisy is so styled in the text: "Beware of the leaven of the pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

Hypocrisy is an affectation of seeming to be what a man is not, in point of piety towards God, or love and charity towards men; it is the counterfeit of religion, an outward show and appearance of it, without the truth of the thing itself.

Because our Lord bids us beware of the leaven, or the hypocrisy, of the pharisees, it will be requisite,

I. To consider the several instances wherein they exercised their hypocrisy.

1. They pretend to greater holiness and devotion, an exacter knowledge of the law, and obedience to it, than others, yet were no better. Acts xxvi. 5. Luke xvii. 10—12. So far from being better, we find them worse. Matt. xxiii. 14.

2. They confined all their religion to outward actions, and neglected purity of heart. Phil. iii. 6. St. Paul means outward actions.

3. They performed those actions with abundance of outward pomp. Luke xviii. 12. Matt. iv. 2, 5, 16; xxiii. 5.

4. More scrupulous in less things than those of greater moment. Matt. xxiii. 23.

5. Some of their institutions were extravagant, contrary to the law of God. Mark vii. 10, 11.

6. They prescribed to others what they themselves would not practise. Matt. xxiii. 3, 4.

7. They displayed much zeal to make proselytes to their party. Matt. xxiii. 15.

II. The command: "Beware."

1. The greatness of the evil.

(1.) Hypocrisy falls exceedingly short of the very thing it pretends to, *i. e.* true religion. It is no more religion, than a picture is a living man. "Dead while they live." 1 Tim. v. 6.

(2.) Charity, sincerity, and integrity, are the very life of Christianity: if we have not these, we are nothing. 1 Cor. xiii. 2. 1 Tim. ii. 6.

2. Hypocrisy is an abuse, a mock, a scorn, and derision of true religion.

- (1.) It deceives man.
 (2.) It insults God, "who searches the heart." Compare Luke xviii. 11. Matt. xxiii. 25. Therefore our Lord interrogates them. Matt. xxiii. 33.
 3. It tends to the utter destruction of true religion, (not in the hypocrite himself, for he hath none,) but in the world.

- (1.) By debauching the nature of it, and turning it to mere formality.
 (2.) By the scandal it brings on religion.

4. The diligence that must be used: "Beware."

(1.) Hypocrisy is easy. It is an easy thing to make an outward show of piety, while lust remains unsubdued. Men never quarrel with religion till it offers violence to their lusts. Luke xviii. 18—23; an easy religion recommends itself to man.

(2.) It is pleasant to flesh and blood. The hypocrite hath an eye on every man but himself. Matt. vii. 3. It is pleasing to be thought pious by those around us; hypocrisy, for a time, may gain reputation. Matt. vi. 2, 5—16. "Verily, they have their reward."

Inferences:

1. If we would avoid hypocrisy, let us avoid the cause of it, pride, ambition, &c. Hypocrisy is never found alone.
2. Beg of the Lord to search us. Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.
3. Seek for the kingdom of God within. Rom. xiv. 17.

THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY OF THE

SUFFERINGS AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, &c.—Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

OUR Lord being risen from the dead, the method he uses to demonstrate to his disciples the certainty of so great a miracle is very complete. He begins with their senses, showing himself to them, and offering to be touched and handled, verse 39. He next addresses their faith by arguments from scripture, proving that "those things must needs be fulfilled," &c. Verse 44. And lastly, completes the conviction, and furnishes them to make the best use of it, by "opening their understanding, that they might understand the scripture; that thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

From which words we may observe,

I. The expediency of Christ's sufferings and resurrection. "It is written."

1. That prophecies might be fulfilled. Isa. liii. 7—10. Dan. ix. 24—27. Zech. xiii. 1.
2. Justice satisfied, peace made and proclaimed. Zech. xiii. 7: Isa. liii. 4—6. Heb. ix. 22; xiii. 20. Rom. iii. 25, 26.
3. That he should rise the third day. Had it been sooner, they might

have doubted his death; if later, it would not have been so striking. Matt. xiii. 40; xvi. 21; xvii. 23; xx. 19; xxviii. 7.

4. To convince and confound his adversaries. Matt. xxvii. 63.

5. To confirm the faith of his disciples. Luke xxiv. 21.

6. To conquer sin, death, and the grave. Col. ii. 14, 15. 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.

7. That he might be the first-fruits. 1 Cor. xv. 20.

8. That after abasement he might be exalted. Rom. i. 4. Phil. ii. 6—11.

II. The blessed effects : that repentance, &c.

1. Repentance. The nature, necessity; Acts xv. 30. Luke xiii. 3; freeness of the grace. Acts v. 31.

2. Remission of sin. Full, Acts xiii. 39; free, Isa. i. 18; by faith, Acts x. 43.

3. In his name. By virtue of his office and atonement, or by his authority. Mark xvi. 15, 16.

4. Beginning at Jerusalem. Christ was first promised to them. Luke. i. 72. The wisdom of God thought fit to lay the foundation of the gospel at that place, where its foundation was first struck at. Matt. xxvii. 63, 64. Other nations might have thought they wanted sufficient evidence of the resurrection of its author.

5. Upon hearing the gospel preached elsewhere, round about them, they might be apt to think that they, for the greatness of their crimes, were passed by, neglected and abandoned.

6. Their day of grace was likely to be the shortest. "Begin at Jerusalem," for yet a little while, and there shall be no Jerusalem; their glass has but a little while to run. But forty years, and Jerusalem shall be destroyed; "begin, therefore, at Jerusalem."

7. It was foretold by the prophets. Isa. ii. 3, 4. Micah iv. 2. Ps. cx. 2. Isa. xxviii. 16; xl. 2. So that beginning at Jerusalem was one prophetic mark of the divinity of this dispensation.

8. For a standing example of the riches and freeness of the grace of Christ, in the offer of it to the vilest of sinners. Begin at Jerusalem, and after the efficacy of my grace appears there, none will doubt; they see it offered to his murderers.

To conclude:

1. The grace of God always prevents and begins with us. Luke xix. 10; xv. 4—20.

2. That repentance and remission of sins are both the fruits of Christ's death and resurrection. Rom. viii. 33, 34.

3. Repentance and remission of sins go together, both in the commission and the nature of the thing.

4. The gospel commission and offer are without exception of nations or persons: "All nations."

5. These blessings are to be offered to the vilest of sinners: "Beginning at Jerusalem."

TRUE RELIGION PROGRESSIVE.

But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—Prov. iv. 18.

“**TRULY**,” saith the wise man, “the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.” A transition from a state of darkness to a state of light, how desirable and important! If natural light be so useful; if the advantages of it are, in every point of view, so many and great; we may take occasion to infer, how much more desirable it is for the soul to have the light of a spiritual life; for “the Sun of Righteousness to arise, with healing in his wings;” to have the rays of divine knowledge beaming forth from the Father of lights into the sinner’s dark understanding, and thence displaying itself, with progressive clearness and lustre, throughout every part of the believers’ journey, and in every step he takes from earth to heaven! Such happiness doth that soul enjoy, upon whom the “Sun of Righteousness ariseth with healing in his wings; whom the day-spring from on high hath visited, giving light to him that sitteth in darkness.” Verse 19. Eph. iv. 18. Isa. lix. 7. On the other hand, “The path of the just,” &c.

Consider,

1. The character of the just.

It is not in a legal, but an evangelical sense, that any of Adam’s fallen posterity can be styled just. Eccl. vii. 20. Such, therefore, as are just, are made so by grace. They become sensible of the wrongs and injuries they have done to God; by divine illumination they see that attempts to make restitution are unavailing; that it is through him alone, who “suffered, the Just for the unjust,” 1 Pet. iii. 18, that their debt of sin and punishment can be cancelled; hence, renouncing all dependence on themselves, and depending on Christ alone, they are justified. Acts xiii. 39.

II. Survey the path of the just.

Before the Captain of Salvation pointed out and led the way, there was no path to heaven; Ps. cxviii. 19; John xiv. 6; but now we are emboldened to “enter into the holiest.” Heb. x. 19, 20.

1. He hath marked the path in which the just are to tread: they are not to walk at random, or pursue their own foolish inventions. Prov. iv. 25—27. 1 Pet. ii. 21.

2. It is a plain path. Isa. xxxv. 8.

3. This is a path that lies much up-hill: there is no avoiding this; we must not attempt to turn aside. Matt. xvi. 24, 25. Luke xiv. 26, 27. Matt. vii. 14.

4. It is a safe path. To prevent wandering, the traveller hath a map of the country put into his hand, with every thing accurately inserted; also a heavenly guide, who whispers to him in the hour of danger. Isa. xxx. 21.

5. There are proper stages all along the path, for weary travellers to refresh themselves. Isa. xl. 31.

6. Those who tread in this path are going forward to the city of habitation. Heb. x. 38, 39. They are all pilgrims.

7. This is a path in which they who take the morning of life, and set out early, generally have the most pleasant journey. Prov. viii. 17. Jer. ii. 2.

III. The progress which the just make is properly compared to the morning and shining light, that shineth more and more.

1. Light is entirely the work of God. It is he who at first said, "Let there be light," who commanded light to shine out of darkness. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

2. The light breaketh gradually, and, from its first appearances, till noon-day, advanceth and increaseth towards meridian lustre. How justly, in this view, is the path of the just compared to the morning and the shining light! In such a gradual and imperceptible manner doth the day of grace sometimes display itself. Luke xiii. 20, 21. Matt. xiii. 31—33. Many other passages represent the righteous as going from strength to strength. Ps. lxxxiv. 7; xcii. 12—14. Mal. iv. 2. Hosea xiv. 5.

3. The path of the just is fitly compared to light, for the pleasure it yields to those who tread it. Eccl. xi. 7. What the queen of Sheba said of Solomon, is much more applicable to Christ and this path. 1 Kings x. 7. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

4. As it is eye-sight that enables us to behold the natural light, so the Lord not only prescribes the path of the just, but gives them spiritual discernment to walk in it; it is this that gives such weight to our Lord's declarations. John xv. 22—24. Luke xii. 47, 48.

5. But though, in so many instances, "the path of the just is as a shining light," yet there is a remarkable difference between the natural day and the day of grace. In the natural world, the sun sets, and darkness advances; in the spiritual world, it terminates in everlasting day: "Their sun shall no more go down for ever." Isa. lx. 20.

Inferences:

1. Have the just a path prescribed for them to walk in? then all who are living to themselves are wanderers from this path.

2. Is this path compared to light? then those who are not walking therein are in darkness. Prov. iv. 19.

3. If "the path of the just be as a shining light," &c. let such as profess to be walking in it, inquire whether they are advancing forward. Phil. iii. 13—15.

JESUS, THE SAVIOUR.

And thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.—Matt. i. 21.

WHEN God brought his first-begotten into the world, the Holy Ghost prepares him a body, the angels bring him down a name, they sing his birth, and adore his person: they have no such need of him, nor interest in him, as we have, and yet they gladly minister to the heirs of salvation, and to the author of it too. Here one of them very seasonably

rescues poor Joseph from his perplexity, scatters his doubts and fears, and makes his uneasy suspicions give way to the joyful expectation of the most wonderful birth, and the most wonderful person, that ever was in the world : where he suspected sin, he found a Saviour from all sin. Matt. i. 20, 21.

I. Make some remarks upon the name Jesus.

1. It seems to be a personal name, and not a name merely of office, as are the names of Christ, Messiah, Mediator. Jesus is the same name with Joshua, which signifies a Saviour. Joshua had his name by a special designation, to signify what he should perform, viz. save the Israelites from their enemies, and bring them into the promised land : Jesus had his name given him by special appointment, to signify that he will also perform to his people all that which his name signifies, viz. "That he shall save his people from their sins."

2. This name Jesus was given by the ministration of angels before he was conceived. Not by private fancy, not by his mother Mary, or his reputed father, not by any man, but Jehovah himself. The God that knew his nature, temper, office, and designs, gave him a name suitable to them all.

3. It was solemnly put upon him at his circumcision. Luke ii. 21. His circumcision was the beginning to act a part suitable to his name : by this he was admitted a member of the Jewish church, "whom he came to seek and to save." Luke xix. 10. By this he became subject to the law of God, bound to its duties, and obnoxious to its penalties.

4. The same Jesus is mentioned as the substance of the gospel-preaching, as comprehensive of the whole method of salvation. Acts viii. 35.

5. All his other names centre in this name Jesus. He had never had the name Christ, the anointed, but in order to be Jesus, the Saviour.

II. The reason of his name. "For he shall save his people from their sins."

It is Jesus that saves by his own power and merit, in a sense that carries an infinite emphasis and sweetness in it, as will appear if we consider the nature of this salvation and the manner of his effecting it.

1. The nature of this salvation. It is,

(1.) A salvation from sin. From the guilt of sin. Rom. iii. 24. The dominion of sin. Titus ii. 12. The filth of sin. Titus iii. 5. 1 Thess. v. 23. The tormenting sense of sin. Heb. ix. 14. The destructive consequences of sin. 1 Pet. iii. 18. Though not from the infirmities of this life entirely, nor the dishonours of the grave, yet so far from the evil of both, as to turn them into a gain. Phil. i. 21.

(2.) He saves us from the wrath of God. 1 Thess. i. 10. Rom. v. 9.

(3.) This salvation is not merely negative, from sin and the wrath of God, but of a positive nature. He saves unto heaven, unto happiness. To God, our chief good ; to heaven, our better paradise ; to the enjoyment of God, in all his perfections ; the Holy Spirit, and all his graces ; Jesus Christ, in all his offices, and with all his benefits ; the gospel, with all its promises ; the covenant of grace, with all its privileges ; heaven, with all its glories : add an eternity to all. 1 John iii. 2.

2. The way and manner by which Jesus saves his people from their

sins. In the general, he saves us from all sin here, and from the wrath to come; from all these evils, and unto the enjoyment of a happiness that begins here in this life, in a justified state, a holy nature, communion with God, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and is completed hereafter. But more particularly,

(1.) He hath meritoriously procured and obtained this salvation for us. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. John iii. 16, 17. Rom. v. 10.

(2.) He doctrinally shows his people the way of this salvation, by his word and Spirit. This he did in his own person; John i. 18; by the apostles; Matt. xxviii. 20; and by his ministers, who preach the same doctrines, repentance, faith, and holiness. Acts xx. 21. Heb. xii. 14.

(3.) He doth effectually begin, carry on, and perfect the work of this salvation in our souls, by enlightening the mind, convincing the conscience of the evil of sin, of the necessity of Christ, of the excellency of holiness.

(4.) Jesus actually confers salvation upon his people. Rev. ii. 10. James i. 12.

Improvement :

1. How much was the heart of Jesus set upon our salvation ! Salvation is woven into the name and style of our Sovereign Lord Jesus, to show what he aimed at, and gloried in. With this name he came into the world, went through it, went out of it, and with this he lives above.

2. We observe the different genius and design of his name, and some other great names in the world. When a great prince is born into the world, he usually takes his name from some province or principality. Some take their names from the devastation and ruin they have made; but when the Lord Jesus came into the world, who made all worlds, he had not one foot of land to take a denomination from. Neither doth he borrow his name from the destruction of the fallen angels, or from the final victory he will obtain over all his enemies : no, but from something that lay nearer his heart, "the salvation of his people from their sins."

3. We ought to observe how he acted up to the full meaning of his name. Salvation is in his name. Whenever he said, "arise and walk," and healed the body; "thy sins are forgiven," and healed the soul; he is acting up to the name Jesus.

4. Let us act up to our expectations from this name. Let us act like those who expect to be saved from their sins; and not as if we hoped to be saved in them.

5. To those who find they have an interest in this blessed name, make use of this name with God, use this name with Jesus himself, use this name Jesus with others, 1 Thess. iv. 1, use it with yourselves.

6. Consider, that the time is coming, when this name Jesus will be the most lovely sound; and he that wears it will appear to be the most lovely person in the world. At death: O then for an interest in this Jesus! At judgment, for an interest in his friendship! And then, "when Christ," &c. Col. iii. 4.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE WATCHFUL SERVANT.

Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.—Luke xii. 37.

VARIOUS and well-chosen are those parables whereby our Saviour gave warning to his disciples, that when he was departed from this world, they should ever be upon their guard; be always in readiness to receive him at his return; that he would come on a sudden, in such an hour as they thought not; that he would demand an account of their behaviour; distribute his recompenses according to their works. Inquire,

I. What is meant by the coming of Christ.

1. He cometh, in the course of his providence, to punish a nation, to destroy a city, to put an end to a state, as he did the Jewish nation.

2. At the hour of death, it is he who appointeth the very moment when the soul shall be dismissed from the body. He is the Lord of the world of spirits.

3. He will come on the day of the general judgment. The words of the text, in their supreme and most important sense, point to this day, when Christ shall come to shut up all the scenes of this frail life, to put an end to the present world, to finish all the works of this mortal state, and to decide and determine the eternal states of all mankind. Matt. xxv. 34, 41.

II. What is implied in the watchfulness which our Saviour recommends.

1. A principle of spirit and life in the soul. Such as are asleep in sin, are not prepared to receive their Lord; they know him not, they love him not, they obey him not. But those who are alive from the dead, whose lamps are trimmed with the oil of grace, and burning with the light of good works, are the only persons who are prepared at the coming of the Lord. It is only this divine life that can secure us from eternal death.

2. A holy solicitude and diligence to know our spiritual state, a keeping all the spiritual senses in proper exercise, a delightful relish of heavenly objects, frequent thoughts of death and eternity, constant waiting for those awful events, with a quick apprehension and resentment of all things that help or hinder the spiritual life.

3. A foreseeing of approaching evil, and preventing it. Prov. xxii. 3, whether from the world, the flesh, or the devil. He hath his spiritual armour girt upon him, he is daily loosening his heart from created things, because he knoweth he must quickly leave them; he is ever upon his watch-tower.

4. A lively and vigorous exercise of every grace, and a diligent attendance on every duty, a constant converse with heaven, Phil. iii. 20, an active zeal for God in the world, a stedfast faith in the promises, a joyful hope of heavenly blessedness, a longing expectation of the coming Saviour. 2 Pet. iii. 12.

III. The blessedness of the watchful soul at the hour of death.

1. That moment dispossesses us of every earthly enjoyment, by dissolving the union between soul and body; removeth us from all commerce with this visible world. The watchful saint is content to be dissolved. Phil. i. 23. 2 Cor. v. 2. The wicked is driven away. Prov. xiv. 32. The believer, with holy pleasure, can bid farewell to all things below; he is going to a world where the Sun of Righteousness ever shines in unclouded glory, and discovers such glories as infinitely surpass all created good. 2 Cor. v. 1.

2. The moment of death finishes our state of trial, and fixes us unchangeably in that state for which we are prepared here. Eccl. ix. 10. As the soul parteth from the body, so it remaineth through all eternity. It is no wonder the sinner is surprised at death, while the saint dies with a hope full of immortality.

3. Death sets us in the more immediate presence of God. The watchful Christian longed and prayed for it; he delighted himself in God, and now he enjoyeth the desire of his heart. Ps. xxxvii. 4; Matt. v. 8. The sinner hated his presence here, and now he is punished with everlasting destruction from his presence. 2 Thess. i. 9.

4. Death, in whatever manner it cometh, is welcome to the watchful soul; he is fit to receive the sentence of death in any form, the great work being done before death appeared. The sinner is in a deplorable condition in that moment. What a madness to leave our infinite concerns at such a horrible uncertainty!

Reflections :

1. None can begin too early to awake to righteousness, since none are too young to be sent for by the messenger death.

2. When we mourn the deaths of watchful Christians, let their preparedness be our support; for, "Blessed is that servant." Matt. xxiv. 46.

THE

GOSPEL, THE WORD OF SALVATION.

To you is the word of this salvation sent.—Acts xiii. 26.

IN this book is shown the Christian doctrine, and the method of applying it to the Jews, heathens, and unbelievers; that is, to those who are to be converted, and those who are converted. The hinderances of it in particular men, in several kinds of men, in different ranks and nations. The propagation of the gospel, and that grand revolution among both Jews and heathens. The victory thereof, in spite of all opposition, from all the power, malice, and wisdom of the whole world, spreading from one chamber into temples, houses, streets, markets, fields, inns, prisons, camps, courts, chariots, ships, villages, cities, islands; to Jews, heathens, magistrates, generals, soldiers, eunuchs, captives, slaves, women, children, sailors; to Athens, and at length to Rome.

In this chapter we find that Paul and Barnabas, after departing from Perga, came to Antioch, in Pisidia, verse 14. "To you is the word of this salvation sent," verse 26. Consider,

I. The nature of the gospel : "The word of salvation."

(I.) Salvation.

1. Salvation supposes misery. The state of the unregenerate is a miserable one.

(1.) With God, alienated from the life of God, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel.

(2.) A state of enmity. Rom. viii. 7.

(3.) Darkness and ignorance. Hos. iv.

(4.) Bondage. Rom. vii. 23.

(5.) Impotence, without strength. John xv. 5.

(6.) In a condemned state. John iii. 36.

2. Salvation implies the whole of our redemption purchased by Christ, and applied by the Spirit. From a state of estrangement to a state of acquaintance. Eph. ii. 19. Enmity, to peace and reconciliation. Rom. v. 1. Darkness, to light. 1 Pet. ii. 9. Bondage, to liberty. Gal. v. 13. 2 Cor. iii. 17.

3. Salvation also includeth pardon, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. Eternal life, a being for ever with the Lord.

(II.) The word of salvation.

Hence the apostle declares. Rom. i. 16.

The gospel is the word of salvation.

1. Because it discovers salvation. The law, separate from the gospel, shuts us up in prison, condemns us, hence called the ministration of death, of condemnation. The gospel discovers and proclaims deliverance. Luke iv. 18.

2. Describes salvation.

3. Conveys salvation, as a charter with an estate, or as a testament doth a legacy. Eph. i. 13.

4. Offers salvation. Isa. lv. 1, 2. Rev. xxii. 17.

II. The sending of this word.

1. From whom? From the God of salvation. Hence called the gospel of God. Rom. i. 1; xv. 16.

2. By whom? Not by angels, but men. 2 Cor. v. 20; iv. 7.

3. To whom? To all sinners. Gen. xii. 3. It includeth all. Every sinner may take hold of it. John iii. 16. 1 Tim. i. 15. Blind, sinful, polluted, lost sinners have a Christ presented in the gospel, who of God is made wisdom, &c. 1 Cor. i. 30. In this word is sent pardon to the condemned, sight to the blind, health to the sick, liberty to the captive, life to the dead, salvation to the lost. "To you is the word of this salvation sent."

Apply.

1. Since the word of this salvation is sent unto us, we need not say, "Who shall ascend to heaven?" Rom. x. 6, 8. Isa. xlvi. 12, 13.

2. Have we received the word of this salvation? It is the interest of all to welcome it.

3. How great will be our condemnation should we neglect it! Heb. ii. 3.

Lastly. Let none despair of salvation, for the word of salvation is sent to the vilest.

THE DIVINE

DISPENSATIONS OF PROVIDENCE AND
GRACE ELUCIDATED.

I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not ; I will lead them in paths that they have not known ; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight : these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.—Isa. xlii. 16.

“KNOWN unto God are all his works, from the beginning.” Acts xv. 18. And he has been gradually unfolding his designs from the beginning. The restoration of the Jews from Babylon, and the calling of the Gentiles into the church, were wonderful events. But in them the prediction before us was fulfilled : it receives a farther accomplishment yet daily. We may take occasion hence to observe,

I. God's dealings are mysterious.

1. The dispensations of his providence have been at all times dark. How ill-judged (according to human estimate) was the direction given to the Israelites, at their departure from Egypt ! Ex. xiv. 2, 3. Yet it eventually led to their more complete deliverance. Ex. xiv. 17, 23, 28. How strange do their long wanderings in the wilderness appear ! yet God conducted them by the right way. Ps. cvii. 7. Deut. viii. 2. The present dispersion of the Jews shall enhance the mercy and the glory of their restoration. Their degradation shall be their fulness. Rom. xi. 12, 13.

2. The dispensations of his grace are equally inscrutable. This is seen in the first quickening of men from their spiritual death. God setteth their sins in array before them. He charged home their guilt upon their consciences. He threatened them with his eternal wrath and indignation. Who would conceive that these were tokens of his love ? How little did the three thousand, when pricked to the heart, imagine that joy was so nigh at hand ! Acts ii. 37. How little could the gaoler, when about to commit suicide, have supposed that his terror was the first dawn of mercy to his soul ! Acts xvi. 27, 29. Thus are many still brought to Christ “in a way which they knew not.”

3. It farther appears in their subsequent spiritual life. Men usually expect to be led on in a way of peace and joy. But God often leaves them to feel the depravity of their own hearts. He sometimes permits them to be in heaviness through manifold temptations. He suffereth also many heavy calamities to fall upon them. They seem, at times, as though they should be overwhelmed. They not unfrequently are brought to the borders of despair. Yet these are ways which God taketh to humble and to prove them. The buffetings of Satan were earnestly deprecated by Paul. 2 Cor. xii. 8. Yet were they necessary to prevent the workings of pride. 2 Cor. xii. 7. How true is that observation of the Psalmist, Ps. lxxvii. 19. How may we all exclaim with the apostle, Rom. xi. 33.

In every dispensation, especially as it respects his people, we may say,

II. His intentions are merciful.

1. The perplexities of his people are often very great. But God has gracious designs in all. Jer. xxix. 11. We may see this remark exemplified in the case of Job. Job x. 3, 16; xlii. 12, 13.

2. The case of Joseph also deserves attention in this view. Gen. xxxvii. 6, 10—28; xxxix. 17, 20.

3. The same mercy is discoverable in God's dealings with all his afflicted people. He suffereth their path to be for a time dark and intricate. But he invisibly directs and manages their concerns. He gradually removeth their difficulties, and cleareth up their doubts. If he prune them as a vine, it is to make them more fruitful. John xv. 2. If he refine them as with fire, it is to make them more pure. Mal. iii. 3. If he shut them up under the law, it is that they may embrace the offers of his gospel. Gal. iii. 23, 24. Thus he constrains them to acknowledge with the Psalmist, Ps. xcvi. 2. They, indeed, are often ready to doubt his love. But,

III. His regards are permanent.

1. God did not forget his people when they were in Babylon. Neither will he now forsake those who trust in him. He may appear for a season to have forsaken them. Isa. lvi. 7, 8. They may be left to complain, as though he had quite forgotten them. Isa. xlix. 14, 16. But his having made them his people, is a reason why he will not recede from his gracious purposes. 1 Sam. xii. 22. The apostle was confident that God would complete his works of grace. Phil. i. 6.

2. He will continue firm and unchangeable in his regard to them. The prophets declare this in the strongest terms. Isa. liv. 9, 10. Jer. xxxi. 37; and xxxii. 40. St. Paul abundantly confirms their testimony. Rom. xi. 29. He commendeth this truth to us as a ground of cheerful confidence in the most trying seasons. Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

Inferences:

1. How careful should we be not to pass a hasty judgment on the Lord's dealings! Isa. xxvii. 6.

2. How safely may we commit ourselves to God's disposal! God alone knows what is best for us. He knows, too, how to accomplish his designs in the best manner. Let us, therefore, commit all our concerns to him. Ps. xxxvii. 6. Let us lie as clay in the potter's hands. Jer. xviii. 5, 6. In whatever distress we be, let us follow the prophet's direction. Isa. l. 10.

THE

WRATH OF GOD AND THE LAMB.

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, &c.

Rev. vi. 15, 17.

WHEN any terrible judgment, or execution of divine vengeance, is denounced against a nation or people, it is sometimes described, in the language of prophecy, by a resemblance to the last and great judgment-day.

An eminent example of this kind, Matt. xxiv. The same manner of prophecy appears in the text. "And the kings," &c. Consider,

I. Who are the persons whose aspect and appearance shall then be so dreadful to sinners. "He that sits on the throne, and the Lamb."

It is God, the Father of all, and the Lamb of God : *i. e.* Jesus Christ dwelling in human nature, to whom the judgment of the world is committed, and by whom the Father will introduce the terrible and the illustrious scenes of that day, and manage the important and eternal affairs of it. Rev. iv. 10 ; v. 6, 13.

If it be inquired, why God the Father is described as the person sitting on the throne ? In scripture he is described as first and supreme in authority, as sitting on the throne of majesty on high, as denoting and commissioning the Lord Jesus to act for him, and as placing him on his throne to execute his works of mercy or vengeance. Rev. iii. 21 ; John v. 22, 27.

If it be inquired, why Christ is called the Lamb of God ?

1. He is called the Lamb, from the innocence of his behaviour, the quietness and meekness of his disposition in the world. 1 Pet. ii. 23.

2. He is called the Lamb, because he was appointed a sacrifice for the sins of men. John i. 29. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19. It was a Lamb that was ordained for the constant daily sacrifice among the Jews, to typify the everlasting influence of the atonement made by the death of Christ. Heb. x. 11, 12. Christ will ever act as a lamb towards his followers ; but to those who are disobedient, and obey not the truth, he will assume the name of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Rev. v. 5, 6.

II. How comes the wrath of that great day to be so terrible ? It is not only the wrath of God, but of the Lamb.

1. It is wrath that ariseth from the clearest discoveries of the love of God neglected. All the former discoveries of the love of God to men were far inferior to the grace which was revealed by Jesus Christ ; and therefore the sin of rejecting him is proportionate, and the punishment will be more severe. Heb. ii. 2, 3.

2. It is wrath that is awakened by the expensive methods of salvation being slighted. Isa. v. 4 ; lv. 1. It is divinely proper that divine vengeance should be the portion of those who have rejected such rich treasures of divine love. Heb. x. 28, 31.

3. It is wrath that must avenge the affronts done to the chief messenger of God's mercy. All the patriarchs, prophets, and angels themselves, were but servants to bring messages of divine grace to men. But the Son of God is the prime minister of his government, and the noblest ambassador of his grace. Heb. i. 1, 2. Ps. ii. 6, 9, 12. He will put on the lion when his commission of grace is ended.

4. It is such wrath as ariseth from the patience of God, tired and worn out by the boldest iniquities of men. It is the character and glory of God to be long-suffering. Ex. xxxiv. 6. And Jesus is the intercessor for that delay of judgment. But God will not always wait and delay, nor will Jesus for ever plead. Ps. l. 1, 3, 21, 22.

5. It is such wrath as shall be executed immediately and eternally. Though Jesus be the Mediator between God and man, there is no mediator appointed to reconcile those sinners to Christ, when they have finally resisted the grace of his gospel. Isa. xxvii. 11. Heb. x. 26, 27.

III. How vain all the refuges and hopes of sinners will be found in that dreadful day, to avoid this wrath and vengeance !

1. Rocks and mountains, whose aid is sought in the last extremity of distress, will be but as spiders' webs. What folly to call upon creatures to help them against their Creator ! What created being dares interpose, in that hour, to shelter or defend a condemned criminal ! Prov. ix. 21.

2. Rocks and mountains, though places of secrecy and concealment, cannot hide them from the eyes of God. Prov. xv. 3. Jer. xxiii. 24. The darkness and the light are alike to him. Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12. The face of the Lamb must be seen in all its unknown terrors. Rev. i. 7.

3. Rocks and mountains, though bulwarks of defence, and places of security, cannot stand before the indignation of the Almighty. Nah. i. 2, 6. The sinner must suffer without remedy, and without hope.

4. Rocks and mountains falling upon us, are instruments of sudden death. When sinners thus supplicate the rocks, &c. they are supposed to endeavour to put an end to their own being, that they may not live to feel and endure the resentments of an affronted God and an abused Saviour. Rev. ix. 6. Their doom is awful. Rev. xiv. 10.

To conclude.

1. What a wretched mistake it is to imagine that God is all mercy, and Jesus Christ nothing else but love and salvation !

2. The day of Christ's patience makes haste to an end. Ps. ii. 12.

3. How very different will the thoughts of sinners be in that day ! Isa. ii. 10, 21.

4. What hideous and everlasting mischief is contained in rejecting the gospel of Christ !

5. Sinners, consider your ways, the danger you are in, and the need you have of a Saviour. Fly to the rock which is higher than you. Ps. lxi. 2. Give yourselves to God without delay.

6. You, whose defence is the rock of ages, continue in him. Behold the Judge appear ! Be faithful, and he will give you a crown of life. Rev. ii. 10.

THE CHRISTIAN'S EXTREMITY IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehorah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.—Gen. xxii. 14.

WE never act more improperly, or err more widely, than when we attempt, by the finite line of our own imperfect powers, to measure or fathom the dealings and dispensations of an infinitely wise Jehovah. It is the province of God to govern and direct, of man to obey and submit. A lesson plain and evident, but which we often find hard to learn, or at least to practise.

The dealings of God with his people are oftentimes dark and myste-

rious; and the way of duty appears not only unpleasant, but painful. To teach us, at a season like this, duty, obedience, and patient resignation to the will of God, the history before us is recorded.

Verse 1. God tempted Abraham, *i. e.* tried or proved Abraham. The Lord calls himself a Refiner: his people are the silver, and affliction the furnace. "He called Abraham:" God knows his by name.

Verse 2. Take thy son: parental affections would listen with expectation to what followed. Not his servant, not his son Ishmael.

Verses 3, 4. Abraham arose, &c. It is hard to imagine what sort of a night Abraham passed: those who are parents may best judge.

Verse 5. Abraham said, &c. Every step of Abraham's conduct is calculated to call out afresh our wonder and astonishment.

Verse 6. And Abraham took, &c. The narrative before us becomes at every period more interesting and painful to his feelings. He doth not in the least delay.

Verse 7. And Isaac, &c. This painful silence is, at length, interrupted by the dutiful youth: "My father." Judge ye how the tender appellation would verberate on the ear of the aged parent!

Verses 8—14. From this narrative we shall now attempt to draw some plain and useful lessons.

I. That God, for the trial of his people, often calls them to severe and painful exercises.

God, in his word, hath called himself a Refiner, &c. Those trials of his people's faith are called precious.

If we look into the history of the people of God, in all ages, we shall find them all exercised with various trials. And, indeed, the more exalted they were in the Lord's favour, the more severe sometimes their trials, &c.

Lot was called to leave his offspring in Sodom; Abraham to offer up Isaac in Moriah; Moses, David, and all the worthies of sacred writ, following in succession, to prove that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.

II. It is our duty to obey the callings and leadings of our God, however unpleasant, painful, or mysterious.

When the commands of our Father are plain and easy, we may obey without murmuring; but when we cannot apprehend the intentions of his dispensations; when flesh and sense begin to comment on his ways, and the path of duty seems rugged and thorny; then it is we begin to halt our pace, and vent the language of repining. To discourage this, and produce a contrary principle, is the history before us.

Our Lord hath given us to expect opposition here. The Christian is called a soldier; the soldier must endure hardness. We are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses.

III. Our subject teacheth us, when we enter on duty, to labour after the removal of impediments.

When Abraham was about to ascend the mountain, he foresaw that his servants might hinder, and, therefore, wisely disposed of them. Duty would not be so difficult, nor the result so little profitable, were we concerned to act in this instance as Abraham; did we labour to have our prejudices removed, &c. Shall the man of science fatigue him-

self; shall the sordid sons of earth deny themselves to accumulate wealth; shall the soldier brave danger and death, only to obtain a little honour; and shall the Christian fear danger, when it is in the way of spiritual attainment; when Omnipotence hath said, "Fear not?" &c. The child that would tremble alone, loses all fear of danger when his father is at hand.

IV. Divine supports are equal to the bearing up of the soul in every scene of danger and trial.

When we behold Abraham's conduct under a trial so severe, we lose sight of the severity of the trial, while we admire the grace that so wonderfully supported him through it.

And the memorable instance before us doth not stand alone; we have an instance in the person of David; when Saul, ignorant of that faith that animated his soul, would have dissuaded him from what he thought an unequal combat, hear the answer he made him. 1 Sam. xvii. 34, 37.

Another instance of this kind we have in the prophet Daniel. Dan. vi. 10. Nor should we forget his three famous countrymen, who became dissenters in the face of death, when duty called them to it. When the Babylonish monarch would have reasoned with them, they cut short his argument with that ever-memorable answer, Dan. iii. 16, 18. They were cast into the furnace, but were they forsaken? Dan. iii. 24. Thus was that promise verified, Isa. xliii. 2.

This powerful support was also evidenced in the case of the first preachers of the gospel, Paul and Silas. Acts xvi. 25.

And do you ask, How supports of this kind are to be obtained? I answer, by waiting on, and trusting in the Lord, &c. Prov. xxix. 25.

V. God, at his own time, and in his own way, will appear for his people's deliverance.

Impatience is often the fault of the Christian; we do not only want deliverance, but we want it in our own way, and at our own time. How often have we blamed the petulant fretfulness of Jonah, and yet how often have we imitated Jonah's conduct!

Not only our afflictions, but their duration, and seeming delay of deliverance, are designed for our good.

Finally. From this subject let us learn to expect our faith to be tried. It is after these things the Lord called on Abraham, *i. e.* after many trials. It is through much tribulation, &c. But let us never forget that God hath said, "My grace is sufficient for thee," &c. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

THE HAPPINESS OF GOD'S ISRAEL.

Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, &c.—Deut. xxxiii. 29.

THIS book is a repetition of much of the three foregoing books; which repetition Moses delivered to Israel from his own lips, that it might affect, and by writing, that it might abide. There is no new history, but

that to the death of Moses, in the last chapter ; neither any new revelation to Moses ; therefore, the style here is not as before, " The Lord spake," &c. Yet it is the word of the Lord by Moses. Hence this book is called Deuteronomy, *i. e.* second law, or a second edition of the law. We need precept upon precept. Phil. iii. 1. The king was to write a copy of this book. Chap. xvii. 18. It was to be written on the stones, xxvii. 23, and to be read publicly, xxxi. 9, 11.

The gospel is a kind of Deuteronomy, a second edition, a redimical, a spiritual law, a law of faith, a law of liberty, a law that maketh perfect.

In the 31st chapter Moses preacheth his farewell sermon ; in the 32nd he gives them a hymn, and in this he gives them a blessing. Having declared each tribe blessed, he, in the text, pronounceth all blessed in general.

I. The character. "Happy art thou, O Israel."

Israel, according to the flesh, were a typical people, typical of the church and people of God under the New Testament.

1. As they were delivered out of Egyptian bondage by the instrumentality of Moses.

2. As they were preserved by a miracle in the wilderness.

3. As they had a promise of farther rest given them ; so the people of God are such as have,

(1.) Been brought out of spiritual bondage, partly by the instrumentality of the law of Moses, and especially by that great Prophet like unto Moses. John i. 45.

(2.) They were preserved in the world by miracle, having bread to eat the world knoweth not of. John iv. 32 ; vi. 48.

(3.) They have a promise of farther rest. Heb. iv. 9.

II. Their happiness, "Happy art thou."

1. As they have the Lord for their God. Ps. cxliv. 15. And none is like to him ; he rideth on the heavens. No enemy can either anticipate or obstruct his progress ; he is the eternal God. Deut. xxxiii. 27.

2. There is none like the Israel of God, verse 29.

What is said of Israel is certainly true with respect to the church of the first-born, on whom there is peace. Gal. vi. 16.

(1.) There is none so well sheltered : The eternal God is thy refuge, *i. e.* thine habitation, or mansion-house. Every Israelite is at home in God. Ps. cxvi. 7 ; xci. 1. 1 John iii. 24.

(2.) None are so well supported ; underneath are the everlasting arms, *i. e.* the Almighty Jehovah is engaged for them. Matt. xvi. 18. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

(3.) Never were any so well commanded and led to battle : he shall thrust out the enemy by his power and by his commission, which shall bear them out : he shall say, " Destroy." Deut. vii. 24. Christ, our Captain, hath thrust out our enemy ; and in his strength we proceed from conquering to conquer.

(4.) Never were people so well secured and protected : Israel then shall dwell in safety alone. Those who dwell in God are safe, though alone, because alone, a peculiar people.

(5.) Never were people so well provided for. The fountain, or the eye of Jacob, is on a land of corn and wine ; Canaan was before them. The eye of the believer is on that better country. Heb. xi. 10, 14.

(6.) Never were people so well armed ; God himself is their shield and sword, Eph. vi. 16, 17.

Lastly. Never were any people so sure of victory : thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, *i. e.* forced to submit against their will. Thou shalt tread on their high places. Thus the believer is more than a conqueror. If we put all this together, surely we shall say with Moses, "Happy art thou, O Israel."

THE REPENTING AND RETURNING PRODIGAL.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, &c.—Luke xv. 18, 19.

In the parables of the lost sheep and piece of silver, we have represented the great pains Christ takes for the recovery of lost sinners. In this parable is set forth to us with what readiness, joy, and gladness our heavenly Father receives the vilest returning and repenting sinners. In the parable we have,

I. A sinner's aversion from God.

1. A sinful state is a state of departure and distance from God : "Took his journey into a far country," ver. 13. Sin is a departure from God.

2. An extravagant state : "He wasted his substance, and spent all." Ver. 13. Eccl. ix. 18.

3. A wretched state : "There arose a famine in the land : he began to be in want." Ver. 14. Rev. iii. 17.

4. A servile state. Ver. 15. John viii. 34. Sinners will try all ways before they will turn to God.

5. A state of perpetual dissatisfaction. Ver. 16. Isa. lv. 2. Ezek. vii. 19. Hosea xiii. 13. Isa. xlv. 20.

6. A state of death, verses 24, 32 : "This my son was dead." A sinner is dead in law, spiritually dead.

7. A lost state : "This my son was lost," ver. 24 ; lost to his father's house. Souls separate from God are lost ; lost as a city revolted to the rebels ; as a traveller who has missed his way in a wilderness ; as a sick man, whose disease mocketh the power of medicine, and baffleth the skill of the physician ; as a prisoner under sentence of death ; and, if infinite mercy prevent not, as a ship that is sunk at sea, lost irrecoverably.

8. A state of madness and frenzy, Eccl. ix. 3 : this is intimated, ver. 17, "When he came to himself." Satan hath possession of the heart.

II. The penitent sinner's return.

1. The occasion of his return, affliction. When he was in want, then he came to himself. Afflictions, when sanctified by divine grace, are often an occasion of turning sinners from the error of their ways. Let Nebuchadnezzar be banished from the society of men, let him be turned to graze with the cattle, and let his locks be wet with the dew of heaven,

and he acknowledgeth the sovereignty of Jehovah. Manasseh, bound with fetters, &c. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11, 12. When no man giveth to the prodigal, he returneth to his Father.

2. The preparative for it, consideration, ver. 17. Consideration is the first step towards conversion. Ezek. xviii. 28.

(1.) He considered the misery of his present state, "I perish with hunger," ver. 17. Sinners will not come for salvation till they see themselves ready to perish.

(2.) How much better it might be made! "How many hired servants have bread enough and to spare," ver. 17. In our Father's house there is bread enough for all, for each, and to spare; yet there is room. Hos. ii. 7.

(3.) Determination: "I will arise," ver. 18. Repentance is arising and coming to God. We will come unto thee. Hos. xiii. 1.

(4.) Confess his fault, "I have sinned," ver. 18. We must take words with us. Hos. xiv. 2.

He would aggravate it: "Against heaven," ver. 21, &c. Sin is like shooting arrows upwards, to fall on our own heads; Ps. lxxiii. 9; vii. 16; a contempt of God's authority, of God's eye: "Before thee," ver. 18.

3. Judges and condemns himself, ver. 19. It is necessary for us to know and acknowledge our own unworthiness.

4. He would sue for admission: "Make me as one of thy hired servants," ver. 19. True penitents have a high value for God's house. Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

5. In all this he would have an eye to his Father: "My Father," verse 18. To have an eye on God as our Father is of great use in repentance.

6. The performance: "He arose and came," verse 20. We should close speedily with conviction. Ps. cxix. 60.

III. The pardoned sinner's reception and entertainment.

1. The affection with which the Father received his returning son: "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him," verse 20: before we call, he answers. "I said, I will confess, and thou forgavest me."

(1.) Eyes of mercy: He saw him, as if on some tower, waiting and looking for his return.

(2.) Bowels of mercy: He had compassion. Hos. xi. 8. Judges x. 16.

(3.) Feet of mercy: "He ran," verse 20. The prodigal came only.

(4.) Arms of mercy: "He fell on his neck," verse 20.

(5.) Lips of mercy: "He kissed him." Not only assured him of welcome, but sealed his pardon.

2. The penitent's submission: "Father, I have sinned," verse 21. This became him, though his Father thus received him. Ezek. xvi. 63.

3. The provision. Verses 22, 23. Jer. xxxi. 18, 20.

(1.) He came in rags: "the Father clothed him with the best robe, a ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet." Thus the believing penitent is clothed with a robe of righteousness and garments of salvation. Isa. lxi. 10. A new nature is the best robe; the earnest of the Spirit is the ring on the hand: Eph. i. 13; the preparation of the gospel of peace are shoes for our feet. Eph. vi. 15.

(2.) He came hungry: and his Father not only fed, but feasted him, verse 23. Those who arise and come to Christ, find his flesh to be meat indeed.

4. Great joy: "Let us eat and be merry," verse 23.

"There is joy in heaven over one sinner," verse 10.

The conduct of the elder brother, verses 25, 30, might serve as a reproof to the scribes and pharisees, for their discontent at the conversion of publicans. He is fretful, complaineth of his father, will not call him brother, "Thy son." The father expostulateth with him: "this thy brother was dead and is alive, was lost and is found; it was meet, then, for to make merry." He was angry; and good men do not always speak the truth when they are angry. The Lord says to believers as the Father. Verse 31. 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. Rev. xxi. 7.

THE GRAND QUESTION.

He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? &c.
John xxi. 17.

THERE is so little inquiry among men concerning the sincerity of their love to God, that it would seem self-evident, and beyond all dispute, whatever sins they indulge themselves in, however much they practically neglect God and religion; yet still they insist upon it that they love him.

But is divine love indeed a thing so common? We read that the carnal mind is enmity against God. Rom. viii. 7. Is there no such thing as a carnal mind now? We are told of some that were haters of God. Rom. i. 30. Enemies to God. Col. i. 21.

The heart-searching Jesus told the Jews, who made a profession of their love to God, "I know you," &c. John v. 42. Would he not say the same with respect to some of us? It is a needful thing, then, for us to enter into a serious conference with our own hearts, and ask them, Do I indeed love the Lord Jesus? Will my love stand the test? What are its properties and effects? This is no superfluous or impertinent inquiry. It did not appear so to Jesus, who interrogated Peter no less than thrice. This is a question in which we are all concerned. Is our conduct, &c. so uniformly friendly and dutiful, as to put it beyond all doubt? Should Jesus call each of us by name, as he did Peter, could we desire him to look into our hearts, and answer in the affirmative?

We are going now upon the search. Do I really love the Lord Jesus? Come, sirs, let us all join in it, and resolve to be determined in this point.

Since there is so much flattery and compliment in the world, a man's profession of Christ and religion is no proof of his love to him. Insincerity and treachery have diffused themselves, like an infectious disease, even into the affairs of religion, so that men dare even to compliment and flatter the heart-searching Jehovah. Judas betrayed his Lord with a kiss.

Nor does true love consist in a speculative and languid esteem, or good opinion of Jesus Christ, &c. Some may flatter themselves that

they love God, under a mistake that he is another kind of a being to what he is; this love would not even pass amongst men.

Having cautioned against these plausible and popular mistakes,

I. Point out some plain marks of divine love, from scripture, and the inseparable properties of that passion.

1. If you would determine this important inquiry, Do I really love? &c. you must inquire how you came by your love. For this love is of a divine and supernatural origin, though the passion of love is innate in our nature. A state of nature is represented as a state of enmity against God. John iii. 6. Rom. viii. 7, 8, and v. 10. Eph. ii. 3. Have we ever been brought from that state? Rom. v. 5. Are we made new creatures. 2 Cor. v. 17.

2. Love produces frequent and affectionate thoughts of the object loved. Ps. cxxxix. 17, 18; xlii. 4; civ. 34. Isa. xxvi. 8, 9. And, on the other hand, his enemies are characterized as persons who do not like to retain him in their knowledge. Rom. i. 28. Who forget God. Ps. ix. 17, and l. 22. God is not in all their thoughts. (Ps. x. 4.) Who practically say to the Almighty, "Depart from us!"

3. If we love God we shall delight in communion with him. 1 John i. 3. John xiv. 21, 23. Eph. ii. 19. And the wicked are represented as strangers, &c. to God. Col. i. 21. Now the ordinances of God are represented as it were the places of interview. Ps. xlii. i. and lxxxiv. and xxvii. 4.

4. If we do sincerely love the Lord, it will be our study and endeavour to please him, by a life of universal obedience. It will not be our inquiry, "Will this or that please man, but will it please God?" &c. John xiv. 15, 21, 23, 24; xv. 14. 1 John v. 3.

5. Love to the people of God. 1 John iv. 7, 12, 20.

II. An address to the friends and enemies of Christ.

1. The friends.

(1.) Continue in his love, and your heaven is sure. Love is the qualification for the enjoyment of God. 1 John iv. 16. Rom. v. 4, 5. 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

(2.) This love is but perhaps faint in some, and will admit of an increase in all. Cry to the Lord to fan the spark into a holy flame. Those who are destitute of this love consider,

2. The enemies.

(1.) It is the supreme excellency you refuse to love. All beauty and perfection centre in him. Heb. i. 3; Song v. 16.

(2.) Your not loving God is an unnatural wickedness; he is your Father. Mal. i. 6.

(3.) Most ungrateful wickedness, when you think what he has done for you. 1 John iv. 10.

(4.) This is a most comprehensive wickedness.

(5.) If this principle and temper be continued, it will exclude from heaven.

(6.) This temper if it continue, will certainly prepare you for, and lead you to hell. Seek for this love.

1.) Labour to be deeply sensible of your aggravating sinfulness and danger.

2.) See the necessity of divine grace to change your hearts, and inspire you with divine love.

3.) Betake yourselves to earnest prayer.

4.) Meditate upon the glory and perfections of God; the great things he hath promised to those who love him. Rom. viii. 28.

Lastly. Never be weary of these means. Prov. iv. 18, 19.

THE GREAT WORK COMPLETED.

I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.—John xvii. 4, 5.

THE promises of God do not supersede the use of prayer. They are rather encouragements to it, as being a guide to our desires, and the ground of our hopes. It is necessary, on our part, in order to obtain the performance of them. Ezek. xxxvi. 37. The same necessity was laid upon our Lord himself. Ps. ii. 8. Hence, in his last moments, he prays for his promised reward. Consider,

I. Our Lord's appeal.

Christ acted in the capacity of a servant. He considereth how his works are completed, and speaketh of them in that view. He appealeth to the Father,

1. That he had glorified him on earth. This he did,

(1.) In his life. The whole of his life was conformed to the divine will. Not the smallest blemish could be found in it. John vi. 38.

(2.) In his doctrine. He declared the Father to the world. He directed persons to himself only as the way to the Father. John xiv. 6.

(3.) In his miracles. These, though wrought by his own power, were ascribed to the Father. John xiv. 10. Hence, the Father was particularly glorified by them. Matt. ix. 8.

(4.) In his death. In this he most eminently glorified the Father. John xiii. 31, 32. Even Peter, in his death, is said to glorify God. John xxi. 19. Much more did Jesus, both in the manner and end of it.

2. That he had finished the work which had been given him to do.

(1.) He had fulfilled the law. This was part of his commission. It was necessary that he should fulfil it, both that the law might be honoured, and that a righteousness should be wrought out for us. He did fulfil it in every point. Matt. v. 17.

(2.) He had satisfied the demands of justice. He had undertaken to expiate sin by the sacrifice of himself. It was necessary he should do so as our surety. He did it by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree. He paid our debt to the uttermost farthing. 1 Pet. ii. 24.

(3.) He had introduced a new dispensation. He had fulfilled and abrogated the Mosaic ritual; set up the kingdom of God among men; commissioned and qualified men to carry it on.

This appeal afforded him just ground for the petition he proceeded to offer.

II. The petition he grounds upon it.

He had before prayed to be glorified on earth, verse 1. He now prayeth to be glorified in heaven. He had a glory with the Father before the world was. He was from eternity with God. John i. 1. As God, he had equal glory with the Father.

1. This glory he had laid aside. He veiled his Godhead in human flesh. Being in the form of God, he took on him the form of a servant. Hence he is said to have made himself of no reputation. Phil. ii. 7.

2. He now desired to resume it. The ends for which he had laid it aside were accomplished. It was therefore expedient that he should resume it. John xiv. 28.

3. He prayed that his human nature might be exalted to a participation of it. This had been promised to him. Ps. xvi. 10, 11. And it was now about to be conferred upon him. Phil. ii. 9.

4. This petition was highly reasonable, as grounded on the foregoing appeal. He had left heaven to promote the Father's glory. He ought therefore, to return to it for his own glory. It was right that his body, which had been the instrument whereby the Father was glorified, should itself be glorified with the Father.

Inferences :

1. How easy is it to see who are real Christians ! Every true Christian followeth Christ, and walketh as he walked. But the end and aim of Christ's life was to glorify the Father. Here, then, is a plain line of distinction whereby we may judge. May we all dread the doom of the unprofitable servant ! May we begin the work assigned us in good earnest ! May we, on our death-bed, be able to make the same appeal, and offer a similar petition to that in the text !

2. What ground of consolation is there for true penitents ? The work assigned to Christ was to redeem a lost world. He perfected that work, so that nothing need or can be added to it. Let penitents, then confide in him and rejoice in his salvation. 1 Tim. i. 15.

3. How blessed is the end of the Christian's labours ! He here laboureth much and suffereth much for God's glory. But soon he shall be glorified with God himself. He shall continue to enjoy that glory when the world shall be no more. Let Christians, then, look forward to the end with joy. 1 Pet. i. 8.

THE SOLEMN WARNING.

This year thou shalt die.—Jer. xxviii. 16.

WHEN we are entering upon the threshold of a new year, it may be well for us to stand and pause, and take a serious view of the occurrences that may happen to us. We cannot predict to ourselves the particular events that may befall us. There are certain events that happen to us every year. We may expect them this year. There are others that sometimes occur in the compass of a year, and sometimes do not ; and there are events which we know are before us, and we are sure they will

occur, but whether this year or next, to-day or to-morrow, is uncertain: such as the close of the present life, and our entering on eternity. That we must die is certain: but the hour or year is wisely and mercifully concealed from us. We should therefore be always ready, and stand in constant expectation. It becometh us to reflect seriously upon the mere possibility of this event happening this year, and realise to ourselves those important consequences that result from this supposition. It is not only possible, but highly probable, that death may meet some of us within the compass of this year. Yes, it is highly probable, that if some prophet like Jeremiah, should open to us the book of the divine decrees, one or other of us would see the divine sentence, "This year thou shalt die."

I. The possibility of this event.

1. This year we may die. For our life is the greatest uncertainty in the world. We have no certainty of another year, another day. Jam. iv. 13, 14.

2. Because thousands have died the last year. This year will be of the same kind. "A time to die," &c. Eccl. iii. 2.

3. Thousands will die this year, and we may be of the number.

4. Though we be young, the regions of the dead are crowded with those who have died in their youth.

5. Though we have not finished our education.

6. Though we be in health and vigour.

7. Though we be full of business.

8. Though we be not prepared for it. "I am not ready," will be no excuse to plead.

9. Though we deliberately delay preparation.

10. Though we be unwilling to admit the thought.

11. Though we may strongly hope the contrary.

12. Though we promise ourselves many years of pleasure. Luke xii. 19, 20.

II. The important consequences, should we die this year.

1. If we should die this year, unpardoned, unrenewed, we shall be forever cut off from the pleasures of the present life.

2. We shall have no pleasures to substitute for those we lose.

3. All our hopes, as to the present life, will for ever perish.

4. We shall be deprived for ever of all the means of salvation. Eccl. ix. 10.

5. All our hopes of heaven will eternally vanish. Prov. xi. 7.

To conclude:

1. And is it possible that we may die this year? How awful the thought, if we are still in our sins! Let us not say, "This year we may not die;" but rather turn our thoughts to inquire, "Is it possible for me to escape this impending danger? Where, how, whence may I obtain deliverance?" If this be our language, our case is not desperate. We have ground of encouragement.

2. How pleasing the thought, and how happy the consequence, if we are believers in Christ, that eternal salvation is so near!

THE PLEASANTNESS OF RELIGION.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
Prov. iii. 17.

THE practice of religion is often, in scripture, spoken of as a way, and our walking in that way. It is the way of God's commandments. It is a highway, the king's highway, the King of kings' highway; and those that are religious are travelling in that way. Christians, in this world, are travellers. When they come to heaven they are at home. Here, they are on their journey; there, at their journey's end. Now, if heaven be our journey's end, the prize of our high calling, and we be sure, if we so run as we ought, that we shall obtain; it is enough to engage and encourage us in our way, though it be never so unpleasant.

But we are told that we have also a pleasant road. There are twelve things which help to make a journey pleasant; and there is something like to each of them which may be found in the way of wisdom, and those who walk in that way.

I. It helpeth to make a journey pleasant, to go upon a good errand.

He who is brought a prisoner, in the hands of the ministers of justice, whatever conveniences he may have on the road, cannot have a pleasant journey. And this is the case of the wicked man. He is going on to destruction. Prov. v. 5.

But he who goeth into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, whatever difficulties may attend his journey, the errand he goeth on is enough to make it pleasant. On this errand they go who travel wisdom's ways. They look for a kingdom which cannot be moved: eternal life. Matt. vii. 14. Prov. xii. 28.

II. To have strength and ability for it.

He that is sickly and lame can find no pleasure in the most pleasant walks. But a strong man rejoiceth to run a race. Those who are walking in wisdom's ways are cured of their natural weakness, and filled with spiritual strength. Ps. ciii. 5; lxxi. 16. Isa. xl. 31. Ps. cxix. 32. Col. i. 11. Isa. xxxv. 6. Phil. iv. 13.

III. To have day-light.

It is uncomfortable to walk in the dark. John xii. 35; xi. 10; Ps. lxxxii. 5.

But wisdom's children are children of the light and of the day. 1 Thess. v. 5. Eph. v. 8. Luke i. 79. Isa. lx. 1.

IV. To have a good guide.

Especially if the way be through a wilderness, where there are by-paths.

But this is both for the safety and satisfaction of the believer. John xvi. 13. Ps. xxxii. 8. Rom. viii. 14. Isa. xxxv. 8; xxx. 21.

V. To be under a good guard, or convoy.

Especially if the way lie through an enemy's country. The Christian has to travel by the lions' dens, and the mountains of leopards; but he has a good guard. Ps. xci. 3. Jude, verse 1. 1 Pet. i. 5.

VI. To have the way tracked by those who have gone before on the same road, and on the same errand.

Untrodden paths are often unpleasant. Heb. vi. 12; xi. 2. Cant. i. 8. James v. 10. Heb. xii. 1.

VII. To have good company.

It is the comfort of Zion's travellers, that they are blessed with good company. Zech. viii. 23. They go from company to company. Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

VIII. To have the way lie through green pastures. Ps. xxiii. 2. Ex. xv. 27. Ps. xlv. 4.

IX. To have it fair overhead.

Wet and stormy weather takes off very much the pleasure of a journey; but when the sky is clear, and the sun shineth, it addeth to the pleasure of travelling. Those who are journeying in wisdom's ways have it fair overhead. No clouds of guilt interpose. Neither are they exposed to storms of divine wrath. Rom. v. 1, 2. Ps. lxxxix. 15.

X. To be furnished with needful accommodations for travelling.

They who are travelling in wisdom's ways shall not want any thing that is good. The Lord will provide. Verily they shall be fed. Ps. xxxvii. 3.

XI. To sing in the way.

This takes off something of the fatigue of travelling: exhilarates the spirits. Pilgrims practised it, and God will put a new song in their mouth. Ps. ci. 1. Isa. xxxv. 10.

And, lastly, it helpeth to make a journey pleasant to have a good prospect.

The travellers in wisdom's ways may look about them with pleasure, 1 Cor. iii. 22; and before them with joy. John xiv. 2.

Let us collect all these particulars together, and we shall surely say, that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST,

A DEMONSTRATION OF HIS CAPACITY TO SAVE.

Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost, &c.—Heb. vii. 25.

ST. PAUL had always expressed a constant, tender, and zealous affection for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. This epistle is a remarkable monument of it. It is directed to the believing Hebrews, and its most evident design is, to animate them to adhere resolutely to the Christian faith. The mind of this excellent man was very capacious, and continually filled with a variety of schemes for the advancement of the gospel. As it was highly probable this, rather than any of his other epistles, would fall into the hands of many as yet unconverted Jews, he not only concealth his name, against which they were strongly prejudiced, but in a very wise and happy manner, maketh use of such sentiments and such language as might be very proper to awaken and convince the unconverted, as well as assist the faith and joy of those who had believed in Christ.

In pursuit of these great and harmonious designs, the sacred writer

insists largely on the dignity of the person and offices of our great Redeemer. He represented him as far superior to the most exalted angels. Heb. i. 4. To Moses. Heb. iii. 2, 6. To Abraham. Heb. vii. 4, 7. And to Aaron. Heb. vii. 11, 24. Hence he draweth the important inference in the text, "Wherefore he is able," &c.

Consider,

I. What are we to understand by Christ being "able to save to the uttermost?"

1. It implieth the danger and calamity of those to whom he is proposed as a Saviour. All were without him, in a state of death, 2 Cor. v. 14; in a state of ruin, Rom. v. 12; but "in due time Christ died for us." Rom. v. 6. "Who of God is made unto us wisdom," &c. 1 Cor. i. 30. Most men are soothed into an insensibility of their danger; hence they hear not the thunder of God's law, Gal. iii. 10, nor see the flaming sword of his vengeance. They sleep on the brink of a precipice; what need of the alarm! Eph. v. 14.

2. A power working out complete deliverance for his people.

(1.) He is able to deliver them from the "curse of the law." Isa. xlii. 21. Gal. iii. 13. Acts xiii. 39.

(2.) From the pollution of sin. Rom. viii. 2. If he but speak, the work is done. Matt. viii. 3. 1 John i. 9.

(3.) From all the artifice and power of the prince of darkness. Col. i. 13. He knoweth how to deceive the deceiver, to detect every laboured stratagem; and from the most dangerous snares, to teach such useful lessons of holy prudence, as shall tend to our constant safety. Ps. lxxiii. 24. "We shall be more than conquerors," &c. Rom. vii. 37—39.

(4.) To support his people in death, and receive their spirits to a world of glory. Ps. lxxiii. 26. 2 Tim. i. 12. Ps. xxiii. 4.

(5.) To raise their bodies from the dissolution of the grave, and conduct their complete persons to the regions of eternal felicity. John xi. 25, and verse 44. Phil. iii. 21.

(6.) That the efficacy of his saving grace continueth the same throughout all succeeding ages. His energy wrought from the date of the first promise, Gen. iii. 15. By faith in him the "elders obtained a good report." Heb. xi. 2. His victorious energy still continueth the same. Heb. xiii. 8.

II. What evidence we have that he is really so.

1. He was commissioned by the Father for this great work. 1 John v. 11. He is the foundation-stone of our salvation. Isa. xxviii. 16. His name is Jesus. Matt. i. 21. God declared him to be his Son at his entrance on his public ministry. Matt. iii. 17.

2. He appeareth, in his person and character, eminently fitted for the work. The mysterious union of the Divine and human nature in the person of our blessed Redeemer is that which renders him the secure confidence of our souls. Heb. vi. 19. He assumed a mortal immaculate body, that he might have somewhat to offer as a sacrifice. Heb. viii. 3. Eph. v. 2. John iii. 14. He was not only an excellent and holy man, but he was God. Rom. ix. 5. Heb. i. 3. Phil. ii. 6. Therefore, "able to save to the uttermost."

3. He has done and borne all that we can imagine necessary to effect it. 2 Cor. viii. 9. Phil. ii. 7, 8. Now he appeareth in the presence of God for us. Heb. ix. 24.

4. He hath been approved by the Father, as having completely answered this glorious design. His power to save, as Mediator, is founded on the efficacy of his atonement. Rom. i. 4. Matt. xxviii. 18—20.

5. He hath made such gracious promises of salvation, as imply a full power of accomplishing it. Extent of grace implieth a correspondent extent of power. Titus ii. 11. 1 Tim. i. 15, 16; and iv. 10. Rom. v. 18.

6. He hath already begun and carried on the salvation of a multitude of souls. Facts are stubborn things. There is a cloud of witnesses of all ages, nations, and tongues, who have been "washed, justified, and sanctified." 1 Cor. vi. 11. Rev. vii. 13, 14. This is farther confirmed by the experience of thousands in the present day.

III. The particular arguments for it: "His ever living to make intercession for them."

The intercession which Christ ever liveth to make is a proof of his being able to save to the uttermost; especially if we consider,

1. The foundation of it, his atonement. Heb. ix. 12. Had not Christ's atonement been satisfactory, his intercession would be vain. Indeed, God could not consistently have permitted him to enter heaven, much less to take up his residence there, under the character of an intercessor. 1 John i. 2.

2. The extent of it. The intercession of Christ is not merely his appearance before God, in the body in which he suffered; but it is attended with a constant and ardent desire that his death may be effectual to the purposes designed, in bringing many sons and daughters to God. Heb. ii. 10.

3. The perpetuity of it: "He ever liveth." Even at this moment Christ appeareth in heaven for us. Isa. xl. 28.

IV. The character of the persons who are encouraged to expect salvation in him: such as "come unto God by him."

A sinner must come to God through Christ. His coming to God implieth,

1. A firm persuasion of his being and attributes. Heb. xi. 6.

2. An earnest desire to secure his favour. Job x. 12. Ps. iv. 6; xxx. 5.

3. A readiness to forsake whatever cometh in competition with him. Isa. xxvi. 13.

4. A willing subjection to his service. Luke x. 27. Rom. vi. 13. Ps. cxix. 16—127.

5. A keeping up a constant correspondence with him. Ps. lxxiii. 23. 1 John i. 3.

His coming to God through Christ implieth,

1. A deep sense of his need of a Mediator, in order to a comfortable intercourse with God. Christianity is the religion of sinners: self must be humbled, that Christ may be exalted. 1 Pet. v. 6. Christ is our day's-man.

2. A full persuasion of his saving power. Mark ix. 24. Matt. viii. 2.

3. A cheerful confidence in the grace of Christ. John vi. 37; vii. 37. Matt. ix. 13; xii. 20.

4. A cordial approbation of the method in which he bestows salvation. Acts xx. 21. Rom. i. 17.

5. A constant care to maintain proper regards to Christ, in the whole course of our walking with God. Eph. ii. 18. Gal. ii. 20. 1 Pet. ii. 5. Reflections :

1. How great is that salvation which the Lord Jesus Christ hath wrought out for us ! Heb. ii. 3. Isa. xliii. 11.

2. How important is it that we all seriously inquire after this great salvation ! 2 Pet. i. 10.

3. How great is the danger and misery of those who reject and affront such an Almighty Saviour ! Rev. vi. 15—17.

4. How admirable and amiable doth the blessed Jesus appear, when considered as the great Intercessor of his people ! Cant. v. 16.

5. With what holy boldness may the sinner draw near to God, in dependence on such an Intercessor ! Heb. iv. 14—16 ; x. 19—22.

6. Let us adore the Divine goodness, that such a salvation is offered us in so reasonable, so easy, and so gracious a way ! Rom. x. 3. Luke xix. 40.

7. Let us seriously examine whether we come to God by Christ. Acts xiii. 26.

8. Let those who have come in this manner be thankful and courageous ; let them go on till the God of peace bruise Satan under their feet, give them victory over death, and finally crown them with eternal life. Rev. ii. 10.

CHRIST, ALL IN ALL.

Christ is all and in all.—Col. iii. 11.

How different is the language in which the sacred writers speak of Jesus Christ, from that adopted by many modern preachers and divines ! Some will hardly condescend to name him : and if they do, it is merely as a man, a good man, a moral philosopher, or at most, a prophet, who taught maxims of wisdom, and confirmed them by virtuous example. Whereas, the primitive and apostolic writers always name him with an evident glow of affection and delight. In short, with them, “ Christ was all in all.”

Let us endeavour to comprehend the phrase : “ All in all ; or, all in every thing,” implieth that the whole of Christianity is full of Christ ; and so it is. The sun is all in all to our system ; he diffuseth light liberally to all the planets which revolve around him, and his heat penetrates to the centre of the largest globes ; on our earth he paints the flowers, embalms the fruits, ripens the grain, quickens all nature into life, and thus becometh all in all to us. Jesus Christ is the Sun of Righteousness ; and whatever the sun is to the material world, that and much more, is our Redeemer to the spiritual world : he is “ all in all ” in the system of Christianity. Let us instance in a few particulars :

I. Christ is all in the scheme of salvation, as it respects God.

He is the covenant-head, both of men and angels, and every gracious decree and purpose of the Divine mind towards them hath an immedi-

ate respect to Christ : so, in the actual communications of the blessings, both of providence and grace, he is the only channel by which they are conveyed. He is the spiritual ladder which Jacob saw, whereby intercourse is opened between God and us.

II. Christ is "all in all" in the work of redemption, as it affects man.

He paid the price of our redemption, wrought out a perfect righteousness for our justification, and communicateth his Holy Spirit for our sanctification : he sitteth both our Prince and Advocate, at the right hand of his Father, where he will wait to intercede for us, until every son of God is brought to glory.

III. Christ is all in all in the sacred scriptures.

All divine truths connect and harmonize in him like the rays of light collected in a focus ; a considerable part of holy writ has a nearer or more distant reference to him. Abraham saw him afar off, and rejoiced in the sight ; Moses pointed to him in all the services of the tabernacle ; the Psalmist mingled the joys and sorrows of the Messiah with his own, or rather appeareth often to have forgotten his own in meditating his : "To him give all the prophets witness." Acts x. 43. John showed him with his finger, "Behold the Lamb of God !" John i. 29, and all the apostolic writers delight even in the repetition of his name.

IV. Christ is all in all in the life of a believer.

His faith looks with a steady eye to the atonement ; his repentance floweth from a believing sight of his sufferings and death, which also filleth his heart with gratitude and love ; his hope is animated by a contemplation of his victories and glory ; every grace receiveth its vigour from a believing view of Jesus. In all the troubles of life, and especially in the prospect of approaching death, this alone can comfort and satisfy the Christian.

Is it not the want of looking more to Christ that maketh so many of the sons of God go lean from day to day ? They look around them, the world is false, and friends are fickle : they look within them, all is dark and comfortless ; let them look above, where Jesus sitteth at the right hand of God, there is strength, and righteousness, and peace and glory.

V. Christ is all in all in the enjoyment of heaven.

"The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to rivers of living waters : " Rev. vii. 17 : so is he the all in all of the celestial anthems. The Father delighteth to honour him, and beameth all his glory through his countenance ; angels delight to honour him, and tune their golden harps to praise him ; saints delight to honour him, and cast their starry crowns beneath his feet. Let us also delight to honour him.

THE INDISPENSABLE NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.—John iii. 3.

THESE words were addressed to a Jew of considerable rank, and, as it appeareth, one of the grand sanhedrim, or chief council of the nation,

who came, not only for his own private satisfaction, but in the name of several of his brethren, to discourse with Christ concerning his doctrine, at the first passover he attended at Jerusalem, after he had entered on his public ministry. Our Lord would, to be sure, be peculiarly careful what answer he returned to such an inquiry : and this is his manner, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," &c.

I. The necessity of regeneration : without it, we "cannot see the kingdom of God."

It will be necessary to consider, what we are to understand by this kingdom, and what is meant by seeing it.

1. The kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven, in general, signifieth the society of those who profess themselves the servants and subjects of Christ, and submit to his kingly government. 1 Sam. xii. 12. Dan. ii. 44 ; and vii. 13, 14. Matt. xxviii. 18.

2. It comprehendeth the kingdom of grace, or the perfect dispensation under which the members of this society are, during their abode in the present world. Matt. xii. 28. Luke xvii. 20, 21.

3. It ultimately relateth to the more perfect form and state of this society in the kingdom of glory. Rom. v. 17. Matt. vii. 21. 1 Cor. xv. 50. To see the kingdom, is to enjoy the blessings of it. Matt. v. 8. Ps. xxxiv. 12. To see it, without enjoying it, is one part of the misery of condemned sinners. Luke xvi. 23.

We now come to show how absolutely impossible it is that any unregenerate man should see the kingdom of God. This we shall do, partly from the immutable constitution of God, whose kingdom it is ; and partly from the nature of its blessings, which no unregenerate man can have any fitness or capacity to enjoy.

1. From the immutable constitution of God, whose kingdom it is.

(1.) The prophets of the Old Testament were commissioned to make this declaration. Ps. vii. 11 ; Deut. xxxii. 41, 42. Ps. xi. 6. Isa. iii. 10, 11 ; lvii. 21. Deut. xxix. 18—21.

(2.) It was renewed by the preaching of Christ. It is true, indeed, that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ ; yet all the grace and gentleness of that administration he brought, did not contradict those awful threatenings ; nay, it obliged him to set them in a stronger light. John iii. 5. Matt. vii. 21—23 ; and xxv. 41. Luke xiii. 2.

(3.) It was renewed by the testimony of the apostles under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Rom. i. 18 ; ii. 5, 6, 8, 9 ; viii. 6, 7. 1 Cor. vi. 9. Heb. xii. 14. 1 Pet. i. 22, 23. 1 John ii. 29.

2. The nature of future happiness is such, that an unregenerate person would be incapable of relishing it.

The scriptures represent the happiness of heaven as consisting,

1. In the perfection of our minds in knowledge and holiness. Heb. xii. 23. Rev. xxi. 27. 1 John iii. 2.

2. In the sight and enjoyment of the ever-blessed God. Matt. v. 8. Rev. iii. 12 ; and xxii. 3, 4.

3. In the beholding the glory of our exalted Redeemer. John xvii. 24. Phil. i. 23.

4. In enjoying the society of angels and glorified saints. Heb. xii. 22, 23. Matt. viii. 11.

5. In the assured prospect of the everlasting continuance of this felicity. 2 Cor. iv. 17. 1 Pet. i. 4.

II. The nature of regeneration ; a being born again.

1. A being born of the Spirit. John iii. 5. 1 Pet. ii. 9. Col. i. 13.

2. A change of disposition. Eph. iv. 22—24. Col. ii. 11, 12.

3. A taking away the power of sin. Rom. vi. 14. 1 John v. 18.

4. A restoring us to the image of God. Rom. viii. 29. Col. iii. 10. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

III. The means of regeneration.

1. Seeking God. Isa. lv. 6. Jer. xxix. 13.

2. Renouncing sin. Isa. i. 16—18 ; lv. 7.

3. Repentance. Acts ii. 37, 38 ; iii. 19.

4. Faith in Christ. Acts xvi. 31 ; and xx. 21.

To conclude :

You, who, through divine grace, “are born again,”

1. Be thankful to God for what you have experienced. Ps. xxx. 4. Col. i. 12.

2. Improve it, by devoting yourselves wholly to God. Rom. xii. 1. Eph. iv. 1.

3. Study to promote the work of God on the hearts of others. Ps. li. 13. Col. i. 28.

4. Long for that blessed world, where you shall live in the fruition of God for ever. Phil. i. 23. 2 Cor. v. 8.

THE

DUTY OF SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES.

Search the scriptures.—John v. 39.

THE scriptures may indisputably be ranked among the greatest blessings that ever God gave to mankind ; it, therefore, highly behoves us to hold them in great estimation. They teach us the mind of God with such perspicuity, that “he who runneth may read ;” and, therefore, all are highly culpable who are ignorant of the subjects upon which they treat. The shameful ignorance of the scriptures, which is manifest in the present day, is justly a matter of regret to all good men. This ignorance of the word of God is probably one principal reason of that scepticism and infidelity which every where abound. Ignorant of the sacred oracles, we entertain the most vague and indeterminate ideas of the plain religion of Jesus.

Christians frequently hold the most absurd notions of the plainest truths ; the humble inquirer after truth can obtain no satisfaction, and hence numbers reject Christianity as a “cunningly-devised fable,” &c.

I. What is implied in the duty here enforced.

The word *search* undoubtedly means something more than a turning over the sacred pages in a careless manner ; it is a metaphor, borrowed from the circumstance of a person digging in mines for some hidden treasure. Now, conceive with what assiduity such a person will seek,

and apply it to the case in hand. Prov. ii. 4. In the word of God there are invaluable treasures, &c.

1. But it seemeth necessary, in a right manner of searching, that we should be directed by what we think the scriptures teach; for it is not probable that we shall diligently strive to understand what we are not determined to make any use of. Every man hath a right to interpret the scriptures as his judgment directs him. "To the law and to the testimony," &c. Isa. viii. 20.

2. That we read them with care and meditation. To read any thing that is worth reading carelessly, is a mere waste of time; here let us make use of our understanding, memory, &c.

3. A comparing one scripture with another, &c. By this method we shall understand the meaning of a great variety of expressions, which are generally very little understood; such as atonement, justification, faith, salvation, sanctification, &c.

4. Read them with much prayer to God. "The things of God knoweth no man but by the Spirit of God," 1 Cor. ii. 11, but by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. "The wisdom that cometh from above" is the most valuable acquisition you can possess, &c.

II. Enforce the duty by a few plain arguments.

1. The express command of God. This ought to outweigh every other consideration. Deut. vi. 6, 7; xvii. 18, 19. Josh. i. 8. The same command we frequently have in the New Testament. Col. iii. 16.

2. Its peculiar excellency. It deriveth its original from heaven. 2 Tim. iii. 16. The character of the persons concerned in publishing it, "Holy men, and moved by the Holy Ghost," 2 Pet. i. 21; Jesus himself speaketh in them. Heb. xii. 25. The subjects they contain. John v. 39.

3. The invariable practice of believers. The example of the best of men ought to have some weight with us. Job xxiii. 12. Ps. xix. 8; cxix. 20, 24, 103.

4. Its peculiar usefulness to the Christian in every condition in life. 2 Tim. iii. 16. The cause of error is a want of attention to the word of God: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures." It is a preservative from temptation; Matt. iv. 7; from sin. Ps. cxix. 11. It is a support under all your troubles: "There hath no temptation taken you," &c. 1 Cor. x. 13. It is a mean of your fruitfulness. Ps. i. 3.

Inferences:

1. What a blessed thing it is that we have the scriptures to search! "He hath not dealt so with every nation." Ps. cxlvii. 20.

2. How much, then, are they to be pitied, who prefer the suggestions of their own imaginations to the scriptures!

3. Let all read the scriptures. Do not consider this as a task, but a privilege; as a privilege for which you can never be sufficiently thankful. When those who read profane authors rise to shame and contempt, it will be to your honour, that, like Timothy, "you have known the holy scriptures; or Apollos, mighty in the scriptures." Acts xviii. 24.

THE BEST COMPANY.

I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.—Ps. cxix. 63.

WE are commanded to imitate those who now, by faith and patience, inherit the promises; and here is a pattern set before us by the Psalmist, worthy of our imitation. We ought frequently to try ourselves by this test; if we be destitute of this affection, whatever pretences we may make to religion, they are vain. Our love must extend to all whom we have reason to believe are the followers of Christ. David was both a prophet and a king; yet he said, "I am a companion of all them that fear thee," &c.

I. Illustrate the character of the people of God: "They fear him, and keep his precepts."

1. They fear him. There is a two-fold fear of God:

(1.) A servile fear; which consists in awful apprehensions of God. Matt. xxv. 24, 25. This believers are delivered from. Luke i. 74. Rom. viii. 15.

(2.) A filial fear: this is the fear intended in the text. This fear is promised. Jer. xxxii. 40. The most eminent saints are recommended for, and described by, this divine principle. Job i. 1. Mal. iii. 16.

This fear of God is represented in scripture as a great preservative against both secret and open sins. Gen. xxxix. 9. Lev. xix. 14. Heb. iv. 1. This fear disposeth those who possess it to perform those duties the Lord requireth; Isa. viii. 13; for this reason the Psalmist prayeth, Ps. xxxvi. 11. This principle is represented in scripture as inseparably connected with the lively exercise of other graces. Col. iii. 22. Ps. ii. 11; cxii. 1.

2. They keep God's precepts; *i. e.* in an evangelical sense.

(1.) In purpose and resolution; they approve of them all. Ps. cxix. 117.

(2.) In affection. Ps. xix. 10; cxix. 77.

(3.) They endeavour to observe them; and to observe them all. Ps. cxix. 1, 28.

II. What is implied in being a companion of those that fear God, &c.

1. A high esteem and affection for them. 1 John iv. 20, 21. Lev. xix. 18. John xiii. 34; xv. 12.

2. A delight in communion with them. Ps. xvi. 3.

3. Joining with them in public worship. Ps. xlii. 1, 2; lxxxiv. 1, 2.

4. A readiness to converse with them. Mal. iii. 16. Ps. xv. 4. Rom. i. 12.

5. To sympathize with them. Rom. xii. 15. Rev. i. 9. Heb. x. 33.

6. A readiness to do them good. Gal. vi. 10. James ii. 15, 16. Mat. xxv. 34, &c.

III. The obligations we are under to aspire after such a temper and behaviour.

1. The relation we profess to stand in to God. Children of one Father; 1 John iii. 1; heirs of the same inheritance; Rom. viii. 17; animated by the same Spirit. Rom. viii. 16, &c.

2. This temper and behaviour are represented as inseparably connected with true love to God himself. 1 John iii. 14 ; v. 1.

3. As no external acts of piety can be acceptable to God without love to him ; so no external duties performed towards the brethren, are pleasing to God without love to them. Matt. v. 23, 24.

4. Love to all who fear God, is mentioned as the most essential and vital part of true religion. 1 Cor. xiii. 4—8, 13.

5. Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer, hath laid us under this obligation. John xiii. 34. 1 John iii. 16—19. Gal. ii. 20. Christ showed his love to his disciples in his unwearied diligence to instruct them : he pitied them under their manifold infirmities : he expressed his love to them by his seasonable admonitions : he condescended to the lowest offices of love.

Lastly. The utility or profit that resulteth from being a companion of those who fear God. Ps. lxxxvii. 2.

Inferences :

1. If it be our indispensable duty to make all who fear God our chosen companions, we must guard against making any our companions who are destitute of this fear. Prov. xiii. 20 ; xxii. 24, 25.

2. This unfeigned and mutual affection among the people of God is a most suitable preparation for the heavenly society. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING THE HEART.

Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.
Prov. iv. 23.

THIS book of Proverbs is full of many divine maxims or general rules. Many parts of scripture are like a golden chain, but this book is like a heap of gold rings ; many precious sentences lie scattered up and down in it, as so many jewels, or spangled diamonds. Solomon was the wisest of kings : as his kingdom was a map of the world's glory, so his head was an epitome of the world's wisdom. He was, also, when he wrote this book, inspired by the Holy Ghost ; and, surely, among all his golden sentences, none is more weighty or important than this, " Keep thy heart," &c.

This text is about a matter of life and death. The words are commanding ; for all counsels in scripture carry with them the force of a command. " Keep thy heart." Here is God's solemn charge to every man, like the judge's charge given on the bench.

In these words we have,

I. A command : " Keep thy heart with all diligence."

1. The duty : " Keep thy heart." We are to keep our eyes ; Job xxxi. 1 ; we are to keep our lips. David bridled his tongue. Ps. xxxix. 1. But, especially, we are to keep our hearts. By the heart we are sometimes to understand the mind, the conscience, 1 John iii. 20, the will and affections ; Ps. cxix. 36 ; but we may understand it here in its full latitude, all the powers of the soul.

II. The manner : "With all diligence ;" *i. e.* with all keeping.

The heart must be kept with all keeping.

1. Keep thy heart as thou wouldst keep a temple. The temple was a holy place set apart for God's worship ; so is the heart of the believer the temple of God ; 1 Cor. iii. 16 ; this heart-temple must be kept pure. The vessels of the temple were cleansed ; 2 Chron. xxix. 15 ; thus the memory, conscience, &c. these vessels must be cleansed. Christ "whipped the buyers and sellers out of the temple ;" Matt. xxi. 12 ; so the cares of the world will be crowding into this temple ; but let us take a whip made of the threatenings of the law, and drive those money-changers out of the temple of our hearts ; let not God's temple be made an exchange.

The temple had a fire burning on the altar. Let us take care of strange fire ; keep the fire of zeal and devotion flaming continually on the altar of the heart ; do temple-work ; offer up the sacrifice of a broken heart, and let your hearts be temples dedicated. 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

2. Keep thy heart as thou wouldst keep a treasure. A man who has got a treasure will secure it. The Christian has got a treasure, and the devil will endeavour to rob him of this ; therefore, keep thy heart as thou wouldst keep a treasure.

3. Keep thy heart as thou wouldst keep a garden. Thy heart is a garden ; Cant. iv. 12 ; weed sin out of thy heart, pride, &c. by self-examination, &c. Weeds prevent the flowers of grace from growing ; where the weed of unbelief groweth, it preventeth the flower of faith, &c. Weeds spoil the walks, and Christ will not walk among the weeds and briars. Christ walketh among the lilies, Cant. vi. 2, not among the thistles. Oh ! then, keep thy heart as thou wouldst keep a garden !

4. Keep thy heart as a wise and experienced general would keep a besieged garrison. The heart is a garrison, or fort-royal ; this garrison is besieged by Satan ; he dischargeth his ordnance, and shooteth his fire-darts ; oh ! then, keep close watch, and make use of the spiritual ammunition. Prayer is the great ordnance ; discharge this cannon, and be sure to put in the bullet of faith.

5. Keep thy heart as thou wouldst keep a prisoner. The heart is guilty ; and though it promise fair, it will give you the slip. You may be too jealous of your friend, but not of your heart.

6. Keep thy heart as thou wouldst keep a watch ; and be sure to wind up this spiritual watch by prayer, and set it by the dial of God's word.

III. Keep thy heart at all times.

1. When thou art alone. Satan availed himself of this opportunity with Eve.

2. When thou art in company, &c.

3. After duty. When Christ had been praying and fasting, then Satan came to tempt. Matt. iv. 3. And if to the green tree, much more to the dry ; to spiritual pride, to discouragement, to presumption.

4. In times of adversity. The devil maketh use of all winds to toss the soul and make it suffer shipwreck ; but when thou canst not comprehend, still adore.

5. In times of prosperity. The moon, the fuller she is, the more remote she is from the sun ; and oftentimes the fuller a man is of the

world, the farther his heart is from God ; “Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked.” Deut. xxxii. 15. It is difficult to abound in prosperity, and not abound in sin ; a full cup is hard to carry without spilling ; the trees are in most danger of the wind when they are full of blossom. As Samson fell asleep on Delilah’s lap, so millions sleep the sleep of death on the lap of prosperity. Prov. i. 32, &c.

IV. The reason : “For out of it are the issues of life.” Matt. xii. 34—37. Luke vi. 45. Gal. vi. 7, 8.

Observations :

1. If thou wouldst keep thine heart, keep the word in thine heart. Ps. cxix. 11. If a mariner would keep his ship, he must keep his eye on the star and compass, &c.

2. Keep good company. That ship is most likely to be preserved from pirates that goes with a convoy ; if we would keep our hearts in our voyage to heaven, let the communion of saints be our convoy. Ps. xvi. 3, &c.

3. Watch over the passions. The heart is in danger from this quarter, as the ship from its own sail : it sometimes sinks with sorrow, swells with anger, &c. A man in a rage is like a ship in a tempest, that hath neither pilot nor sails. Moses, in a passion, spake inadvertently with his lips : and, oh ! how many have lost their hearts in a storm !

4. Keep all the avenues to it. The eye ; Gen. iii. 6 ; the ear, keep it open to God, and shut to sin ; the thoughts, Jer. iv. 14.

Lastly. Get Christ into the heart. Eph. iii. 17. He will adorn and defend it ; and you shall be kept by the mighty power of God, &c. 1 Pet. i. 5. Jude, verse 1.

SIN, EXCEEDING SINFUL.

That sin might become exceeding sinful.—Rom. vii. 13.

“FOOLS make a mock at sin,” but wise men tremble at it. Children may take the serpent in their bosoms, but men of sense and experience will fly from it : its colours may be pretty, but they know its sting. We know, indeed, that it is “an evil and bitter thing to sin against the Lord ;” but we do not always remember this ; we forget the danger until we feel the pain. Whence ariseth this ? Certainly, from our not hating, as we ought, this worst of evil ; it is the only thing that deserveth our hatred, and it deserveth nothing else.

The following hints are offered to encourage this pious hatred, and make sin appear in its true colour ; that is, exceeding sinful.

Consider,

I. The nature, purity, and extent of the divine law.

This is the apostle’s principal meaning : “sin by the law, becometh exceeding sinful.” But how doth the law effect this ? It levels, in the sight of God, the vain distinctions of mankind, and invalidates all the fond excuses which some men frame, from their elevated situations, to indulge themselves in beloved vices ; it extendeth to the secret desires

and wishes of the heart, and condemneth the very thoughts of foolishness as sin. Prov. xxiv. 9.

II. The goodness and mercy of God.

That goodness which formed us with powers capable of serving and enjoying him, that cast our lot among a thousand circumstances of comfort and delight, that nursed our infant years, and that has supported and protected us thus far through life: that mercy which pardoneth all our crimes, and crowneth that pardon with every blessing, both of time and of eternity. Consider this goodness and mercy; remember, sin abuseth and despiseth both, and then say, "is not sin exceeding sinful?"

III. The awful effects of sin on the human mind.

That it hath darkened the understanding, deprived us of those just and charming ideas of God, which a state of innocence must have possessed; torn us from the most divine communion with him, and filled our minds with every false and gloomy notion, every evil prejudice and propensity.

We see a great part of mankind devoted to the most gross idolatry. Some worship the meanest parts of the creation, in preference to the Creator; others prostrate themselves to the work of their own hands. Nor are they chargeable with less guilt and folly, "whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame." Phil. iii. 19.

Now, when we see mankind thus degraded to a level with the beasts, yea, so much beneath as to worship them; when we reflect that sin hath done all this, must we not confess, that "sin is exceeding sinful?"

IV. The dreadful calamities which sin hath brought on individuals.

Alas! what hath sin done? Rather, what hath it not done? Here it hath thrown together an unhappy multitude of, perhaps, once prosperous and wealthy men, to subsist, in the days of age and infirmity, on the miserable pittance of public charity. There it hath collected a number of sick and maimed persons in an hospital; one burneth with a fever, another pineth with a consumption; this man laboureth with the asthma, and that agonizeth with the stone. Job xiv. 1.

Yon horrid prison is the abode of guilt and poverty. Numbers of distressed mortals are doomed, by their relentless creditors, there to waste away their lives, and starve their families; numbers more of miserable wretches there receive the tedious reward of their iniquities. In that dreary dungeon the wretched malefactor waiteth, in torturing expectation of a shameful death.

Lastly. Behold an hospital for lunatics! Within those lonely walls are confined many of our fellow-creatures, deprived of the last remains of manhood, reason. Ah! that gloomy visage shows what melancholy preys upon the heart. Alas! those rolling eye-balls indicate, too plainly, the fire that rageth in the bosom! He raves! rattles his chains! and stalks in all the dignity of madness! The one was, formerly, all cheerful and alert; the other, all mildness and composure. But what hath sin done? Defaced the image of God, and scarcely left even the exterior form of manhood. Is not "sin, then, exceeding sinful?"

V. Recollect the judgments of Heaven on whole nations and communities of men.

All histories abound with these: but we will not examine them; we

will confine ourselves to a few instances of sacred history. In one age, a populous world is drowned for their crimes, one family alone survives the general destruction. In another, five cities, and all their inhabitants, save three persons, are destroyed by fire from heaven. In a third instance, two hundred and fifty princes, with their houses and their goods, are swallowed by an earthquake, for their rebellion against God. Num. xvi. At one time, seventy thousand men are slain by a pestilence; 2 Sam. xxiv. 15; and, at another, a hundred and eighty-five thousand died in one night. 2 Kings xix. 35.

Whole nations have been rooted out of the earth; witness the ancient inhabitants of Canaan: and once populous and imperial cities became the haunts of beasts of prey, as Babylon and Tyre.

Shall we go on? No! The survey is too much for human nature; and these instances of divine vengeance sufficiently prove the "exceeding sinfulness of sin."

VI. Contemplate the sufferings of Jesus Christ, when sin was laid on him, and the awful consequences of sin to the impenitent heart.

The last of these is a dreadful subject for reflection indeed! One could wish never to admit it within our thoughts, were not those miserable beings to warn us, "set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Jude, verse 7. Ah! my soul, these are the wages of sin; these the pains which thou must for ever have endured, had it not been for the voluntary substitution of the Son of God. Yes, adorable Sufferer! in every agony which marked thy countenance, in every pang which rent thy heart, I read the sinfulness, the "exceeding sinfulness of sin." Oh! whenever, therefore, it shall assault my soul, with all the guile of the serpent, &c. may I turn mine eyes to groaning Calvary!

FAITH, THE INTERNAL WITNESS.

He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself.
1 John v. 10.

THERE are two points of great and solemn importance, which it becometh every man to inquire into; First, Whether the religion he professeth be true and divine; and secondly, Whether he hath so far complied with the rules of this religion, as to stand entitled to the blessing thereof.

Many are the outward testimonies that God hath given to the gospel of his Son: many witnesses have confirmed it, from the time that Christ appeared in the flesh to the day when St. John wrote this epistle. If we trace his life, from the cradle in the manger, to his cross and the grave, we shall find the rays of divinity still shining round his doctrine and his works, still pointing to his person, and proving his commission with a convincing and resistless light.

At his birth, the witnessing angels appeared in much brightness, and while the Son of God lay an infant below, his record was on high; for there appeared a strange new star, and was his witness in heaven. The

wise men of the East were his witnesses, when they came from afar, and paid tributes and offerings, gold and incense, to the God, the King of Israel.

Simeon and Anna, in the temple, by the spirit of prophecy, witnessed to the holy child Jesus; and the doctors with whom he disputed at twelve years old, were his witnesses, that there was something in him more than man. At his baptism, the Father and the Spirit witnessed to the Son of God: they told the world that this was *He*, the Messiah; the Father, by a voice from heaven saying, "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. His life was a life of wonders, and each of them witnessed to the truth of his commission, and to the divinity of his doctrine. Every blind eye that he opened, saw and witnessed Jesus, and declared his divine power; every one of the dead that he raised were his witnesses: they came from the land of silence to speak his glory, and to give a loud testimony to his mission from heaven. The devils themselves, when he drove them out of their possessions, confessed that he was Christ, the Holy One of God; but he had no mind to accept their witness, and therefore forbade them to speak.

Miracles attended him to the cross and the grave; and opened the grave again for him, and made a passage for him to his Father's right hand. Nor did the witnesses of his person and of his doctrine then cease; for, that "salvation which began to be spoken by Jesus the Lord, was afterwards published by those that heard him; God himself bearing them witness with signs and wonders," as in Heb. ii. 4.

But all these still were outward witnesses, to convince an unbelieving world. There is an inward witness which our text speaketh of, that belongeth to every true Christian: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."

Consider,

I. What is implied in "believing on the Son of God."

1. A believing Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of the world, the Messiah foretold by the prophets, the Seed of David after the flesh, but declared to be the Son of God, Rom. i. 3, 4, the Eternal Word, John i. 1; verse 14; 1 Tim. iii. 16.

2. A belief of his doctrine. That we are sinners, condemned by the law; that he came to fulfil this law. "That we must be born again." Matt. v. 17, 18. Gal. iii. 13; iv. 5.

3. A committing the soul into his hands. 2 Tim. i. 12. Depending on him for life and salvation, called "a looking to him, coming to him," &c. This faith uniteth the soul to him, bringeth peace, Rom. v. 1, overcometh the world.

II. The witness that faith gives to the truth of Christianity, with some of its properties.

1. He that believeth hath the thing witnessed, verses 11, 12. He that believeth hath eternal life, by promise, by hope, by anticipation, &c.

2. He that believeth hath the witness, or testimony, that "Christ is the Son of God; the true light; the resurrection and the life;" for they are partakers of that light, life, pardon, peace, adoption, &c.

III. The properties of this witness, or testimony.

1. It is an inward witness, dwelleth more in the heart than in the head. 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.

2. Though an inward witness, it will appear in the life and conversation. If we be the "epistles of Christ, we shall be known and read of all men." It is as the ointment. Prov. xxvii. 16.

3. It is a strong and powerful evidence. It is drawn from experience, and all the arguments that are advanced against it are but as spears of straw against the scales of a leviathan.

4. An universal evidence. All who believe have it; the illiterate as well as the learned.

5. It is, or ought to be, a growing witness. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

To conclude :

1. How glorious the dispensation of the gospel! 2 Tim. i. 10. What consolation doth it afford! 1 John v. 13.

2. What ground of self-examination! "He that believeth hath the witness in himself."

CHRIST, A DESPISED AND REJECTED SAVIOUR.

He is despised and rejected of men.—Isa. liii. 3.

THAT the whole of this chapter relateth to the Messiah, is universally acknowledged; and whosoever hath read the history of our Saviour's life and sufferings, with a proper degree of attention, cannot fail to have remarked the exact accomplishment of this part of the prophecy in particular: "Christ came unto his own, and his own received him not."

The learned, the rich, and the mighty among the Jews, were almost universally combined against him; the most opposite parties, the pharisees, and the sadduces, united their endeavours to discredit his doctrine and mission; he was condemned by the supreme council of the nation as an impostor and blasphemer. Nay, the whole body of the people disowned him in the most public and contemptuous manner before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, crying out, as with one voice, "Away with him! away with him! crucify him, crucify him!" Thus was he "despised and rejected of men," in the days of his humiliation, to which the prophet more immediately referreth.

But as the Jews are not the only people chargeable with this crime; as Christ hath been, and still is, "despised and rejected" by many, even by many of those who were baptized into his church, and are called by his name; we may be allowed to consider the prediction in the text as reaching beyond the time of our Saviour's abode on this earth, and looking forward to all that injurious contempt, which, in after-ages, should be cast upon the blessed Jesus, by pretended friends, as well as by open and professed enemies. Taking the words in this large extent,

Consider,

I. In what respect it may still be said, that "Christ is despised and rejected of men."

True it is, that his glorious person is no more exposed to the outrage of men ; that body which was scourged, buffeted, spit upon, and crucified, is far beyond the reach of any such abuse. But yet there are other, and no less criminal respects, in which he is still “despised and rejected” of many ; to say nothing of those who openly “deny the Lord that bought them ;” neither to notice those who entertain and publish opinions evidently inconsistent with a real esteem of him.

In general, those who are grossly ignorant of his religion must necessarily be reputed despisers of him ; as the means of acquiring that knowledge are so easy. More particularly,

1. Those may be said to despise Christ, who practically deny his authority by breaking his commands. We are expressly told, that “all power is committed to him ; that God hath put all things under his feet.” Now, not to honour him in this character, by cheerfully obeying him, is to despise him.

2. Those who do not receive him as their alone Saviour ; as the true and living way to the Father. He is set forth, in Scripture, as the sole Mediator : to honour him in this capacity, is to renounce all hope of being justified or saved by any other means ; to rely wholly on his sacrifice and intercession ; and those who come short of this may be said to “despise and reject him.”

3. Those who do not give him the chief room in their hearts, and prefer him in their choice to every thing. The language of a true disciple is, Ps. lxxiii. 25 ; and Christ himself says, Luke xiv. 26.

II. The causes of this contempt.

1. A secret unbelief, of which they are not aware. Because they are not downright infidels, they imagine themselves believers.

2. Love of the world. Luke xviii. 18. Matt. xxii. 5. 2 Tim. iv. 10. 1 John ii. 15.

3. Ignorance of our own condition. Rev. iii. 17. The whole, or those ignorant of their disease, treat their physician with scorn and contempt.

4. Many despise and reject Christ, from a supposition that they may safely turn to him when they please, or at the article of death.

III. The malignity of this sin.

1. To despise and reject Christ is the blackest ingratitude. Christ might address them as he once did the Jews, John x. 32.

2. It is the most insolent contempt, both of the wisdom and goodness of God. Those charge God with folly, who reject the terms of the gospel covenant.

Such is the malignity of this sin ; nay, it is a daring of God to execute the rigour of his justice. Many may reply, “What ! is thy servant a dog?”

3. It is an act of rebellion ; a bidding defiance to the Most High. Ps. ii. 3. Phil. ii. 9, 10.

Improvement :

1. Let us make an impartial inquiry into our esteem of Christ. We may weep at the history of his sufferings, may feel some emotions of gratitude and joy when we hear of the greatness of his love ; yet unless our esteem of Christ be greater than our esteem of all other things, and

we manifest this esteem by cordially accepting of him, and cheerfully obeying him, we shall at last be ranked among the despisers of Christ.

2. Have not many despised him too long?

3. If we come to him by prayer and faith, he will not reject us. John vi. 37.

THINGS UNSEEN—ETERNAL.

But the things which are not seen are eternal.—2 Cor. iv. 18.

THE most weighty and awful word in the whole compass of language, is eternity. A word which we often hear, but its vast meaning and importance, it is to be lamented, is not sufficiently considered.

In the context the apostle is telling the Corinthians what it was that supported his mind under all his afflictions, viz. the hope and prospect of a blessed immortality. This was what he looked at, aimed at, and pursued. The reason of his intensely looking at it, and solicitously pursuing it, was, "the things which are seen are temporary, of short and uncertain continuance; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

I. Illustrate the general nature of eternity.

Eternity is duration without limits: what hath no beginning and no end is eternal. There are some creatures in the universe which have a beginning and an end, as the whole brutal creation: there are some beings which had a beginning, but shall have no end, viz. angels and the spirits of men; these are properly everlasting, but not eternal. There is only one being who is strictly and properly eternal, the ever-blessed and adorable God. His infinite mind comprehendeth at one view every thing, past, present, and future, in every period and instant of his eternal duration. Ps. xc. 2. Isa. lvii. 15.

II. Consider eternity with particular application to our own souls, their immortal nature, and future everlasting state.

1. Our souls are immortal, or everlasting. Man consisteth of two parts, the one gross, visible, and material; the other pure, invisible, and immaterial; *i. e.* the soul or spirit; which principle animateth, but doth not derive its being from the body, Gen. ii. 7, nor dependeth upon the state of the body for its continuance in being. The powers of the conscience, that dread of a future state which guilt occasioneth in all, are incontestable proofs of the immortality of the soul. The sacred writers assert this in a variety of places. Eccl. xii. 7. Luke xii. 4; xx. 36—38.

2. The state to which the soul is removed at death is eternal, unchangeable.

The present is a state of trial, at the close of which the soul of man is removed to that state for which it was fitted. The scriptures speak of a state of happiness and misery only: each is of eternal duration.

1. The happiness of heaven is eternal. Holy souls when they are taken out of this world, are admitted to paradise; *i. e.* a state of glory

and happiness, not equal to that which they shall enjoy after the resurrection. Luke xxiii. 43. 2 Cor. xii. 2—5. John x. 28. Rev. iii. 12.

2. The misery of hell is eternal. The word of God assureth us, that they who die in their sins, and in their blood, are removed to a state of misery and torment; at the judgment of the great day they shall be condemned to continue in the same, or a worse state, for ever. Mark ix. 43—48. 2 Thess. i. 9. Jude ver. 7.

Reflections :

1. How great are our obligations to God, for discovering eternal things to us, and making provision for escaping everlasting misery, and obtaining everlasting life.

2. What folly and madness are men chargeable with, for neglecting their eternal concerns !

3. How serious should the ministers of the gospel be in addressing the souls committed to their charge ! Heb. xiii. 17.

4. What an awful thing it is to die, and enter upon an eternal state ! One, with propriety, calleth death “the gate of eternity.”

Looking at eternal things implieth,

1. A firm belief of their reality; that we have immortal spirits; that there is an eternal state just before us. These are unseen things: the eye of the mind is to be directed to them. Heb. xi. 1.

2. A serious consideration of their importance. We are not merely to take a transient glance of eternal things, but to look at them with a fixed, stedfast eye, or dwell upon them by close meditation, to bend all the powers of the mind to study them, as subjects of the utmost importance.

3. A steady aim and diligent pursuit, agreeable to their nature and importance; or, a diligent, incessant care to escape eternal misery, and secure eternal happiness. Phil. iii. 13, 14.

Arguments to enforce this duty.

1. Life, time, and means are given us to prepare for eternity. 2 Pet. iii. 9. Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

2. We must quickly go out of time into eternity. The imaginations of men place eternity at a distance, therefore they forget it. Amos vi. 3. Matt. xxiv. 44. James iv. 13, 14.

3. As our character is, when our time endeth, so will our eternal state be. Eccl. ix. 10; xi. 3.

4. Many present and great advantages will attend our looking at eternal things. It will restrain our fondness for the world, increase our hatred of sin, love to God, make us careful to redeem our time, promote our patience under afflictions, make us serious and lively in all the duties of religion, and willing to die.

THE UTILITY AND IMPORTANCE OF A SANCTIFIED MEMORY.

By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.—1 Cor. xv. 2.

WE have here the usefulness of a good memory in spiritual things described. It shows our salvation, in a certain sense, dependeth upon

it ; for, without the gospel, no salvation : without faith, no benefit by the gospel : and, without hearing and remembering what we hear, no saving faith.

I. This noble faculty is dreadfully corrupted by the fall.

This appears but too plainly, from our remembering what we ought to forget ; and forgetting those things which it is our indispensable duty and highest interest to remember.

1. No doubt can be made but we should remember our Creator, and what he hath done for us. Eccl. xii. 1. And yet how true is Jer. ii. 32. Ps. lxxvii. 11. Deut. viii. 2.

2. Our Redeemer, and what he hath suffered for us. Luke xxiv. 20.

3. The doctrines of Christianity, especially the most important. Mal. iv. 4. 2 Pet. i. 12.

4. The duties of religion. Ex. xx. 8. Heb. xiii. 2, 3, 16.

To forget this is as absurd as if we should forget to eat and drink ; for, as Christians, we live by faith, and breathe by prayer.

5. Our sins, and their horrid aggravations ; as there is a culpable, so there is a useful remembrance of them. Ezek. xxxvi. 31. Deut. ix. 7.

6. Our vows and obligations to God.

7. The church and their various concerns. Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6.

8. Our own latter end. Isa. xlvii. 7. Lam. i. 9.

II. The memory may be renewed by grace.

The sanctifying Spirit is able to create this also anew, and render it a useful repository of all necessary truths.

1. By purifying the faculty ; conversion is said to begin here. Ps. xxii. 27. Rev. ii. 5.

2. By strengthening the memory to retain divine things. John xiv. 26.

3. By causing the soul to love holiness and hate sin. What we sincerely love we readily remember. Ps. cxix. 16.

4. By causing us to long for the sincere milk of the word, and to labour after a greater acquaintance with the promises and threatenings, doctrines, histories, &c. of the Bible. Num. xv. 39, 40. Ps. ciii. 18.

III. The hinderances of a good memory in spiritual things.

1. A dark and weak understanding. Except a thing be clearly understood, it cannot be well remembered. Matt. xiii. 19.

2. A carnal, careless heart. What we do not much regard, we cannot long remember. According to the impression on the heart is the retention in the memory.

3. Any darling sin, as it fills and employs every faculty, so it especially debauches, monopolizes, and disorders them all. Matt. v. 29.

4. Excess of worldly cares. The memory is but finite, though capacious : a superabundance of useless thoughts must weaken it. Matt. xiii. 22.

5. Surfeiting and drunkenness. Prov. xxxi. 4, 5. Hos. iv. 11.

6. Violent passions. Passions we must have ; but constitution and education allay them in some, reason moderates them in others, and grace regulates them in every true Christian.

7. A multitude of indigested ideas. When a thing is well studied and clearly apprehended, it will be much better remembered.

IV. The helps to the memory.

1. Natural helps :

- (1.) A sober diet.
- (2.) A quiet mind.

2. Artificial :

- (1.) Diligent reading.
- (2.) Frequent repetition.
- (3.) Careful writing.
- (4.) Accustoming ourselves often to use our memory.

3. Spiritual :

(1.) Bewail your forgetfulness : there reformation, when it is sound, must begin. Though some may reckon a bad memory but a small fault ; yet, to those who know the scripture account of it, it will appear to be the cause, effect, and sign of much evil. Ps. ix. 17.

(2.) Fervent prayer for better memories. James i. 17. John xiv. 26. Luke xi. 13. Especially when hearing or reading, dart up a short prayer. 1 Chron. xxix. 18.

(3.) Diligent attention. If the mind wander in hearing, the memory will be weak in remembering. Ps. cxix. 93.

4. Due estimation. The more we love and admire any thing, the better we remember it. What is the reason a woman cannot forget her sucking child ?

And, lastly, serious meditation. When people hear or read, and instantly plunge into foreign business, generally all is lost. James i. 24, 25.

Application :

1. Bless God for a good memory, and be daily improving it to his glory. Let us remember, it is a great means of knowledge. Prov. iv. 20, 21. Of faith, as is plain from the text, and Matt. xvi. 9. Of comfort. Ps. cxix. 52. Of thankfulness. Ps. ciii. 2. Of hope ; for experience worketh hope, and the memory is the storehouse of experience. Lam. iii. 21. Heb. xii. 5. Of repentance. Ezek. xvi. 63. Amos. vii. 7. Heb. ii. 1.

2. Let young people especially be very careful in the use of all the forementioned means, to strengthen their memories. Deut. vi. 7.

3. Bless God for your memories, and be not too proud of them ; they may soon be lost.

4. Let ministers, who preach or write, consider the memories of their hearers and readers, and be careful to observe method and order in their books and sermons.

5. Let us all labour for more holiness ; for that raiseth all the faculties, reduceth them to a right state, and fixeth them on their proper objects.

6. Always practise what you remember. May these remarks be useful, at least, to bring better things, of the same kind, to our remembrance : so shall God have the glory, we the comfort !

JOYFUL TIDINGS TO A CAPTIVE PEOPLE.

Arise, shine ; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.—Isa. lx. 1.

ADMIRABLE is the worth and depth of Divine Providence ! While we forget the wonders of Providence, we direct our thoughts to baser ob-

jects, and think not on it; and, if we do look toward it, judge rashly and think amiss of it. If this be true of that general providence whereby God ruleth the world, it is more true of his special providence towards his church. Therefore, it requireth sobriety in judging: above all other things, he that suddenly judgeth in this, maketh haste to err. To have a right view of it, it must be taken all together, and not by parcels: pieces of rarest artifice, while they are making, seem little worth, especially to an unskilful eye; which being completed, command admiration. There is a time when the daughters of Zion embrace the dunghill, and sit desolate in the streets; and, at the same time, the voice of Babylon is, "I shall sit as a queen, and shall see no sorrow:" all is out of order here. But, if we stay awhile, we shall see Zion and Babylon appointed to change seats, by the great Master of the world: "Come down," saith he, "daughter of Babylon, and sit in the dust:" Isa. xlvii. 1. And to Zion he saith, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

The prophet, elevated by the Spirit of God to a view of after ages, as clear as if present, seemeth here to find his people sitting under the dark mantle of a sad and tedious night; and having long expected the sun's return, in vain, before its time, they give over expectation when it is near them. Now, the prophet, as it were, standing awake on some mountain, perceiveth the day approaching, and the golden chariots of the morning of deliverance hasting forward, and seemeth to come speedily with these glad news to a captive people, and soundeth this trumpet in their ears, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come." The very manner of expression is sudden and rousing, without a copulative: Not arise and shine; but, "arise, shine."

The words have in them a clear relation to a low posture and obscure condition: they suppose a people lying or sitting without light. The Lord maketh manifest his power and wisdom more in the deliverance of his people from such afflictions, than if he had still preserved them in constant ease. And, though he appear to neglect them long, he declareth, Ps. lxxviii. 13. And at the end, "Arise, shine." But, surely, the strain of this prophet riseth higher than any temporal deliverance. This prophecy is a description of the kingdom of Christ under the gospel.

Consider,

I. The command, "Arise, shine."

This is the voice of the gospel to the sons of Adam.

1. Arise: this hath reference,

(1.) To a fallen or lying posture. In Adam we all fell. The sin of the first man was the great fall of mankind; fallen by actual sin. Hos. xiv. 1. 1 John v. 19.

(2.) Sitting posture. Matt. iv. 16. Ps. i. 1.

(3.) Sleeping: sin is frequently represented, in holy writ, under this idea. Eph. v. 14.

Lastly. This voice may import, that man is spiritually dead.

Arise, 1. By consideration. Hag. i. 5.

(1.) Returning. Luke xv. 18.

(2.) Taking hold of the covenant. Jer. l. 5.

(3.) By attending to the voice of Christ. Cant. ii. 13.

2. Shine, or be enlightened, and then shine.

(1.) Relatively ; ministers, parents, children, masters, servants.

(2.) Humbly ; to his glory whose light ye borrow. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

(3.) Progressively. Prov. iv. 18.

(4.) Constantly ; in the night of adversity, as well as in the day of prosperity.

II. The reason : Arise, for the glory of the Lord is risen : shine, for thy light is come.

1. Thy light is come. Jesus Christ is called the true Light, the Light of the world. Luke i. 78.

(1.) Light is the first object of sight : and Jesus Christ is the prime object of the understanding.

(2.) In this world, light, being first visible, all things are seen by it : thus Christ. Eph. v. 13. Isa. viii. 20.

(3.) Light fully resembleth Christ in purity. Light shineth upon the basest parts of the earth, yet remaineth pure and undefiled ; Christ seeth and taketh notice of all the pollutions in the world : there is nothing hid from his beams ; many of those he cures : he is polluted by none. Though he be the Fountain open for sin and uncleanness, yet he remaineth undefiled. Zech. xiii. 1.

(4.) Malachi calleth him the Sun of Righteousness. The light of the sun is neither parted nor diminished by being imparted to many people and nations at the same time : nor is the righteousness of this Sun of Righteousness lessened, either to himself or believers, by many partaking of it ; there is enough for each and for all. Mal. iv. 2.

(5.) None are deprived of the light of the sun, except those who are either blind, or shut up in a dark prison : so none are deprived of the light of the Sun of Righteousness, but those who are blinded by the god of this world, or shut up in the prison of hell. 2 Cor. iv. 4.

(6.) The sun hath a vivifying power, not only on plants, but some say on the generation of man : this is more certain of this Sun we speak of, in man's regeneration. John i. 4.

Finally. All darkness fleeth away before the sun ; gross is the darkness of man, till Christ enlighten him. Before this Sun the darkness of the mind fleeth. Ps. xxxvi. 9.

2. The glory of the Lord is risen.

(1.) The ark of God was called the glory of the Lord ; it enjoyed that name as a type of Christ.

(2.) The tabernacle is called the dwelling of God's glory ; typifying Him in the tabernacle of whose human nature that glory dwelleth far more excellently. John i. 14. The apostle calleth him the Brightness of his Father's glory ; and Col. ii. 9.

(3.) This light and glory is also a defence. Ps. xxvii. 1 ; lxxxiv. 11. Isa. iv. 5. Zech. ii. 5.

(4.) This light and glory is not only defensive of those that embrace it, but likewise destructive of all those who continue to oppose. Isa. x. 17, 18.

Let us, therefore, welcome this light ; let us imitate those people who have five or six months' night, of one piece. It is reported of them, that when they perceive their night draweth towards an end, they put on

their richest apparel, and ascend the highest mountains, with emulation who shall first discover the returning light. But, alas! when our light shineth, it findeth us in love with darkness.

BLIND BARTIMEUS RESTORED TO SIGHT.

And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.
Mark x. 52.

Two things are especially taught in the word of God: the wretchedness of man, as a sinner; the ability and readiness of Christ, as a Saviour. In order to the latter truth being our consolation, the former must be set home to our hearts by the power of the Spirit of God. To inform men upon these two grand and important articles is, or ought to be, the object of every discourse delivered from the pulpit.

The words of the text are a narrative description of a miracle wrought by our Lord; from which narration we may probably be able to draw some pertinent and useful lessons.

In the situation and case of this poor man, we have portrayed, in the most lively colours, the natural estate and condition of sinners, and the wondrous work of the Spirit of God in their regeneration.

Consider,

I. That the situation of this blind beggar is a fit emblem of the natural man, verse 46.

Were we to take the opinion of an unregenerate man respecting his own estate, he would, in more respects than one, be ready to say, "I am rich," &c. But, if we take the testimony of God's word, they are of a truth, poor and miserable, &c. Being ignorant of their state, they go about establishing a righteousness of their own. Rom. x. 3.

The usual attendants of temporal poverty are, want of, or, at least, ragged apparel, want of food, want of possessions: such is, spiritually, the lot of the unregenerate; destitute of the robes of righteousness, the bread of life, and spiritual riches.

II. It is the work of the Spirit of God to bring a blind sinner to Christ.

One principal part of man's wretchedness, is being wholly insensible of his real state; also, averse to receiving instruction. It is the work of the Spirit to enlighten, convince, allure, or draw, and convert.

III. When a soul is enlightened by the Spirit of God, it will, by that Spirit, be brought to cry for mercy, ver. 47.

While the soul is in darkness, insensible of danger, there is no crying for mercy; till, like Peter, the soul seeth itself sinking: then, whatever may have been its hopes, mercy is now its only plea.

IV. When a sinner begins to cry for mercy, he will meet with many interruptions, ver. 48.

While Bartimeus was quiet, none seemed to have regarded him; no sooner did he begin to cry out, but he became an object of general atten-

tion: "And many charged him that he should hold his peace:" "Hold thy peace, sinner!" saith Satan; "thy guilt is swollen beyond the bounds of mercy; there is pardon with God, but not for thee; it is too late." "Hold thy peace!" say the men of the world; "do not enrol yourselves among madmen and enthusiasts."—"Hold thy peace!" saith pride; "thou art not so bad as many."—"Hold thy peace!" saith carnal reasoning. "Hold thy peace!" also, sometimes saith the lukewarm professor, &c.

V. That, when a sinner is brought in earnest to seek after Christ, nothing will satisfy him but a sensible interest in mercy: "He cried the more," ver. 48.

Fully convinced that Jesus was able to restore his sight, and powerfully feeling the miseries attendant on his blindness, Bartimeus would listen to no intercessions; but with redoubled vehemence, repeateth his cry. This is the case with a truly awakened sinner: a Manasseh, a Magdalene, a thief, a persecuting Saul, stand forward to encourage him against all the insinuations of Satan. Reputation will be forfeited, pride mortified, &c. for a sensible interest in mercy.

VI. The kind attention of the Saviour to the cry of sinners, ver. 49.

The gospel not only discovereth to men their lost state, but it holdeth forth a Redeemer that saveth to the uttermost, who casteth none out that cometh to him: Christ, in the gospel, calleth on sinners. Matt. xi. 28.

VII. The conduct of Bartimeus when called by the Saviour, ver. 50.

So ready was he to obey the summons, that he resolveth to have no hinderance in the way. Exactly so the awakened sinner, who, when he heareth the Redeemer's voice with power, he casteth away all his filthy, self-righteous raiment. A man never can come aright until he come in this manner. Hos. xiv. 3.

VIII. The desires of the sinner who is coming to Christ, are after spiritual light and knowledge, ver. 51. "That I may receive my sight," is the answer of Bartimeus to our Lord's request. And thus the seeking soul wisheth to have the eyes of the mind fully opened, to have clear views of self, of Christ, the way of salvation by him.

IX. Our Lord's answer and work, ver. 52.

When, at the command of Christ, the light of the day visited the eyes of Bartimeus, with what astonishment would he be struck when he beheld the various objects that surrounded him! Equal, nay far greater is the astonishment of the sinner, when, at the Saviour's command, spiritual light shineth on him.

X. The effect and cure, verse 52.

This is the consequence of an experimental knowledge of redeeming love. The soul that hath been saved by Christ will delight to follow him. This is the grand criterion for us to distinguish by, whether we have experienced the work of the Spirit. Luke ix. 23.

To conclude:

1. Have we been made sensible of our blind, miserable estate?
2. Have we come to Christ for mercy?
3. Are we following him in the regeneration?

DIVINE CONDESCENSION.

What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?—Job vii. 17.

HERE is a question that is both answerable and unanswerable. We have the like question, Ps. viii. 4.; cxliv. 3, What is man? *i. e.* miserable man, sorrowful man. When questions are put concerning God, they are to raise our admiration. Ex. xv. 11. Mic. vii. 18. But these questions concerning man carry with him a low estimation. As is said by way of contempt, Who are you? Questions in scripture often abate the sense. Zech. iv. 7. 2 Sam. vii. 18.

I. Give a scriptural solution of the question, What is man?

1. What is man, as a creature? If we trace him to his original, we find him to be a piece of modified dust, enlivened by the breath of God. Gen. ii. 7. 1-Cor. xv. 47. Hence Jeremiah crieth, "O earth, earth, earth." An earthen vessel. 2 Cor. iv. 7. Ps. ii. 9. What is man? Isaiah telleth us,

- (1.) He is grass. Isa. xl. 6, 8.
- (2.) A drop of a bucket, verse 15.
- (3.) Dust, that will not turn the scale, verse 15.
- (4.) Vanity. Job vii. 16. Isa. xl. 17.

2. What is man as a fallen creature? The Spirit of God declareth that he is,

- (1.) An ignorant creature. Isa. i. 3.
- (2.) A guilty. Rom. iii. 23.
- (3.) A condemned. John iii. 18, 19.
- (4.) A polluted. Job xv. 16. Isa. i. 16.
- (5.) A diseased. Isa. i. 6.
- (6.) Impotent. Ezek. xvi. 4, 6.
- (7.) Rebellious. Num. xx. 10. Isa. i. 2.
- (8.) Dead. Eph. ii. 1; v. 14.

II. In what respects it may be said that the Lord magnifieth man.

(I.) "What is man," said the Psalmist, "that thou art mindful of him," so as to visit him, to be mindful of him, and to make account of him? and Job, in the text, "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him?"

1. The Lord magnified man at the creation. He builded a stately house, and provided it with all necessary furniture, before he gave him a being. He reared up the glorious fabric of heaven and earth for his use, spreading the heavens as a curtain over him, and studded and embellished it with stars. He places him in the garden of Eden, making colours to gratify his eye, sounds to please his ear, &c. Ps. viii. 3, 8.

2. By the care he sheweth towards him in the course of his providence. Ps. cxlv. 15, 16. Hos. ii. 21, 22.

3. By assuming human nature. Heb. ii. 16. John i. 14. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

4. By giving us such great and precious promises, whereby we are made partakers of the Divine nature, &c.

And, lastly, by making man a sharer of his throne.

{II.) That thou shouldest set thine heart upon him; *i. e.*

1. That thou shouldest take such care of him. Prov. xxvii. 23. Samuel useth this language to Saul. 1 Sam. ix. 20. So the Lord taketh care of man. Isa. xxvii. 3.

2. The affections and desires. Ps. lxii. 10. Col. iii. 2.

3. High esteem and account. Deut. vii. 7. John iii. 16.

Observe,

1. How amazing, that the Lord should thus notice sinful man! He who is the high and lofty One. Isa. xl. 12.

2. The base ingratitude of sinners, who rebel against so kind a benefactor. Isa. i. 2.

3. If God thus magnifieth man, ought not man to endeavour to magnify God? *i. e.* praise and extol him. Ps. xxxiv. 1, 3.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST, THE CHRISTIAN'S GLORY.

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Gal. vi. 14.

THE cross of Christ was the favourite topic of St. Paul's contemplation. The cross of Christ was the chosen subject of his sermons, and the grand theme of his writings. At all times, and in every capacity, he professed, he avowed, he gloried in the cross of Christ. Nay, what is very remarkable, he gloried in nothing else: and what is still more observable, he abhorred the thought of glorying in any thing else. He speaketh of such a practice in the language of detestation and dread, accounting it a high degree both of folly and wickedness. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Consider,

I. In what the apostle would not glory.

1. Not in the greatness of his learning as a scholar. He was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. His genius and industry were no way inferior to his other advantages. Acts xxii. 3.

2. Not in the strictness of his life, &c. as a Jew. Acts xxii. 3, 5, 26. This also he counted loss for Christ.

3. Not in the eminency of his gifts, nor in the extent of his usefulness. He had been caught up into the third heaven. He had planted churches; yet all these things, in point of justification, were insufficient; therefore, in none of these he gloried.

II. In what the apostle did glory.

He glorieth in the cross, the cross of Christ, of Jesus Christ, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. By the cross of Christ may signify, not only his death, but the whole of his humiliation and suffering. The apostle mentioneth the cross to remind us of the manner of his death. The Author of liberty suffered the death of a slave; the Fountain of honour, the height of

disgrace. The punishments wont to be inflicted on the meanest were inflicted on the greatest. Nothing more opposite than glory and shame. The cross itself is an object of shame. In this, it appeareth to the apostle full of glory.

2. Glorifying signifieth the highest degree of esteem. The cross of Christ was an object of which the apostle had the most exalted sentiments, the most profound veneration.

3. The manner of his expressing his esteem of this object hath a remarkable force and vehemence in it, God forbid! Let it by no means happen, whatever others do.

III. The reason that the apostle had to glory in the cross of Christ.

The cross of Christ affordeth sinners a matter of glorying: yea, it is the only thing in which we ought to glory. The blessings that accrue from the cross of Christ are so great.

1. Pardon. Acts xiii. 38. Ezek. xviii. 22. Jer. l. 20.

2. Reconciliation. Rom. v. 10. Well might angels sing at his birth. Luke ii. 14.

3. Holiness. Titus ii. 14.

4. Victory over death. Heb. ii. 14, 15. Phil. i. 22, 23.

5. An entrance into heaven. Heb. ii. 10.

Surely, then, those who do not glory in the cross of Christ are guilty of the greatest insensibility and ingratitude.

To conclude:

1. Let us study the cross of Christ as men. Here we may contemplate the wonders, the unparalleled wonders of a God made man, dying, as a pattern of patience, a martyr for truth, an all-perfect sacrifice for sin. Here we see all the Divine perfections harmonize and shine forth in the salvation of man.

2. As Christians, let us hope and glory in the cross of Christ. We have, in the cross of Christ, the richest provision for all our spiritual wants. This is a foundation of the most sublime hope, and a fountain of the most exuberant joy. This affordeth matter for the deepest humility, and yieldeth fuel for the most flaming love. Faith in a crucified Christ is an ever active principle for the most cheerful and exact obedience, an inexhaustible magazine from which we may fetch arms to conquer the allurements of the world, the solicitations of the flesh, and the temptations of the devil. And by this a way is opened to us into the holy of holies. Well, therefore, might the apostle say, "God forbid," &c.

SINNERS GATHERED TO CHRIST.

And unto him shall the gathering of the people be.—Gen. xlix. 10.

THE former part of the verse is the third promise of grace and of Christ to mankind. The first we have, Gen. iii. 15. The second, Gen. xxii. 17. And this is the third. It is both fuller and plainer than the former. We have,—1. The sign; the sceptre shall not depart, &c.—2. The

event; the coming of Shiloh, *i. e.* peace, rest, or sent. Christ is the Prince of Peace, Rest to the weary, Sent of God. The text relateth to us; to him shall the gathering of the people be. Isa. xi. 10, 12; xlv. 5; lvi. 8.

Consider,

1. There is an outward, corporal gathering. Isa. ii. 3. But many gather to ordinances who are never gathered to Shiloh. Some, like the Athenians, to hear news; some as the Pharisees; some, like the Jews, to seek after the law; some, like the Greeks, to seek after wisdom; some to gaze and muse, and others to sleep, as though they had been brought in dead corpses, to have their funeral sermon preached; and but few gather to ordinances to attend on the word, as the star to guide them to Christ. Ps. lxx. 4.

2. In the gathering of the people to Shiloh, there are certain gatherers employed. The great and glorious gatherer is God. Eph. i. 10. Christ, John xi. 52. The Spirit, who is said to reveal Christ, to testify of him, and to glorify him. Rev. xxii. 17. The preachers of the gospel. 2 Cor. vi. 1; Dan. xii. 3.

3. From which they are gathered.

(1.) From every quarter. Luke xiii. 29. Ps. lxxviii. 31. Isa. xliii. 5, 6.

(2.) From every element.

1.) Some are gathered out of the water. Hence preachers of the gospel are called fishers of men; and the gospel, a net. Matt. xiii. 47.

2.) Out of the fire. Zech. iii. 2. Isa. ix. 18.

3.) Out of the earth. Out of the mire and clay. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 11.

4.) Out of the air. Many were building castles in the air, and subject to the prince of the power of the air. 2 Cor. x. 5.

4. What is imported in this gathering.

(1.) It supposeth straying, and importeth conversion. Isa. liii. 6. Hence we are called on to return. Iv. 7, 8.

(2.) It supposeth scattering, and importeth convention. Ps. cxli. 7. John xi. 52.

(3.) It supposeth rejection, and importeth reception. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

(4.) It supposeth separation, and importeth union. Eph. ii. 22.

(5.) It supposeth rebellion, and importeth subjection, reconciliation, and obedience.

(6.) It supposeth a missing, or losing, and importeth restoration and recovery. Rom. iii. 25. Eph. ii. 3. Luke xix. 10.

II. The persons. To him shall the gathering of the people be.

1. Sinful people. Isa. xlv. 12, 13; i. 4.

2. Diseased. Mark ii. 17.

3. Imprisoned. Isa. lxi. 1. Zech. ix. 12.

4. Deaf, blind, wretched, &c. Rev. iii. 17.

III. To whom. To him; *i. e.* unto Shiloh.

1. To his throne. Heb. iv. 16.

2. Righteousness. Isa. xlv. 24.

3. Name. Prov. xviii. 10. Cant. i. 3.

4. Bosom. Isa. xl. 11.

5. Fulness. Col. i. 19; ii. 9. John i. 16.

To Him shall the gathering of the people be. As sheep to their shep-

herd. Isa. xl. 11. As doves to their windows. Isa. lx. 8. As fishes to the net. Matt. xiii. 47. As chickens under the wings of the hen. Matt. xxiii. 37. As vessels to their harbour. Heb. vi. 19. As stones to a building. 1 Pet. ii. 4.

IV. The means by which they are gathered.

1. There is a gathering providence. Hos. ii. 6. Ps. cxix. 67.
2. A gathering storm and tempest. Heb. xii. 18. Gal. iii. 24.
3. Gathering invitations and promises. Isa. lv. 1. John vi. 37.
4. A gathering wind of the Spirit. John iii. 8. Ezek. xxxvii. 9.
5. A gathering Sun. Mal. iv. 2.

To conclude :

1. If we have been gathered to Shiloh, He will be precious to us.
 2. Though many have been gathered, yet there is room.
 3. Let those who are already gathered, endeavour to gather others.
- Num. x. 29.

BELIEVERS, CHILDREN OF PROMISE.

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.—Gal. iv. 28.

THE narration of the history we have, verses 22, 23, and the explanation, verses 24, 27 ; the confirmation, verses 27, 28.

I. The character ; believers are children of promise.

1. By regeneration. John iii. 7. James i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 3.
2. By spiritual nourishment ; as the word of promise hath a generative, so also a nutritive virtue. Isa. lv. 1 ; lxvi. 8, 11 ; 1 Pet. ii. 2.
3. In respect of education ; they are educated by the grace and virtue of the promise. Isa. liv. 13.
4. With respect to assimilation, likeness, and conformity. Titus ii. 11, 12. Rom. vi. 17. 2 Cor. vii. 1. John iii. 3.

II. State the comparison, and run the parallel in a few particulars. “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was.”

1. Isaac was the child of Abraham ; not by natural power. Gen. xvii. 19. So are believers. Gal. iii. 17 ; verse 29. And by virtue of the promise, Gal. iii. 8, compared with Gen. iii. 18. Gal. iii. 16. Thus, as Isaac was a child of the promise made to Abraham, so are believers not only children of the promise made to Abraham, but also to Christ. Heb. ii. 13.

2. Isaac was the fruit of prayer, as well as the child of promise. Gen. xv. 2, 3. May we not allude to this here ? John xvii. 20, 24.

3. Isaac's birth was the joy of his parents. Gen. xxi. 6. Even so with reference to believers. Luke xv. 7. Gal. iv. 27.

4. Isaac was born not after the flesh, but by the promise ; not of the bondwoman, but of the free. Compare Gal. iv. 22, 23, with verses 24, 25, 26, 28, 31. So believers are not under the law. Rom. vi. 14.

5. Isaac was no sooner born but he was mocked by Ishmael : so it is now. Gal. iv. 29. 2 Tim. iii. 12. Luke xxi. 17. 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14.

6. Isaac was the heir by promise, though thus persecuted. Gal. iv. 30,

compared with Gen. xxi. 10 ; xv. 3, 4. Even so believers. Rom. viii. 17. 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. The trials and difficulties that encountered Isaac in the way of the accomplishment of the promise were very great. Gen. xxii. 2, compared with Heb. xi. 17, 19. Now, in like manner, the children of promise have to encounter extraordinary difficulties : providences may run so cross to the promise, as that the fatal knife may seem to be at the very throat of the promise ; but faithful is he who hath promised. 1 Pet. iv. 12 ; i. 7.

III. How the promise hath such virtue for begetting children to God.

1. As it is the discovery of divine love. Titus ii. 11. Rom. i. 16, 17.

2. The object of faith. Rom. x. 17.

3. The ground of hope. 1 Pet. i. 3.

4. The seed of generation. 1 Pet. i. 23, 25.

5. The communication of grace. Heb. viii. 8, 12. Acts xxvi. 18.

6. The chariot of the Spirit. 2 Cor. iii. 8. Gal. iii. 14. Ps. cx. 3. Isa. lix. 21.

Inferences :

1. If believers are children of promise, then boasting is excluded. Rom. iii. 27 ; iv. 5.

2. Then salvation is free. Rom. iv. 6. Eph. ii. 8.

3. The happiness and dignity of believers : they are the children of God, Gal. iii. 26 ; of the kingdom, Matt. xiii. 38 ; of Zion, Ps. cxlix. 2 ; of Jerusalem above, Gal. iv. 26 ; of light, Luke xvi. 8 ; of wisdom, Matt. xi. 19 ; of Abraham, Gal. iii. 7 ; of the resurrection, Luke xx. 36 ; of grace and glory, heirs, &c. Rom. viii. 17. May they not exclaim with the apostle, 1 John iii. 1, 2.

4. The misery of the wicked. Who are children of the night, &c. 1 Thess. v. 5 ; of the curse, cursed children, 2 Pet. ii. 14 ; of wrath, Eph. ii. 3 ; of perdition, John xvii. 12 ; of iniquity, Hos. x. 9 ; of disobedience, Eph. ii. 2 ; children of hell and the devil, 1 John iii. 10. Matt. xiii. 38 ; xxiii. 15. John viii. 34. Yet such once were the children of promise, Eph. ii. 3. 1 Cor. vi. 11. Hence the apostle, in the text, " Now we, brethren," &c. Let us, therefore, attend to the apostle's injunction, 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

THE SAINTS' SECURITY.

And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.—Rev. iv. 3.

THERE were three things which John saw in a vision : first, a throne set in heaven ; by which we may understand the church militant, and the glorious dispensation of grace under the New Testament economy. This throne is said to be set in heaven. Heb. xii. 22. By him who sitteth on the throne, we may understand Christ in our nature. Rev. v. 6. Ezek. i. 26. Like a jasper and sardine stone ; the brightness of the jasper and the redness of the sardine stone are connected. White in his divine, red in his human nature or sufferings, as it were of a lamb

slain. Isa. lxiii. 1, 2. "And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald." Rev. iv. 3. Here we may conceive a manifest allusion to God's covenant with Noah. Gen. ix. 13. When the Lord called back the waters of the deluge, he made a promise, and bound himself by covenant, that he would not again destroy the earth by water; and in token of his faithfulness, set his bow in the clouds. With allusion to this, God's throne of grace, or mercy-seat, from which all the promises of the covenant do proceed, is said to be surrounded with a rainbow, to signify, that God dealeth with his people in the way of covenant. In sight like unto the emerald, *i. e.* of a green colour, to signify the perpetuity of the covenant, by virtue of the faithfulness of him who hath engaged in it. The word of the Lord endureth for ever.

Consider,

I. A few things respecting the covenant of grace, and the faithfulness of God engaged in this covenant.

1. The covenant.

(1.) The occasion of the covenant of grace, like that of Noah, was a deluge of wrath, which broke out on Adam and all his family, in consequence of the violation of the covenant of works: this is pointed at, Ezek. xvi. 4, 8. By the breach of the covenant of works, we become alienated from the life of God, enemies in our minds, darkness, under wrath and condemnation.

(2.) The rise and spring of this covenant; the surprising love of God. John iii. 16. Jer. xxxi. 3. Eph. ii. 4, 5.

(3.) The revelation of this covenant. Gen. iii. 15. The first edition was enlarged and explained to Abraham, Moses, David; and more fully opened by Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and other prophets, till Christ himself actually came, and, by his death, confirmed this covenant. After his resurrection, this covenant came forth in its last and best edition.

2. The faithfulness of God engaged in this covenant.

(1.) It is not a hasty or an indeliberate deed; but the result of his eternal purpose and counsel. Men may speak before they think; the word of the Lord is sure and stable, as mountains of brass.

(2.) God cannot forget his covenant; man may promise and forget. Isa. xlix. 15.

(3.) Will not change his mind. Heb. xiii. 8. Ps. cii. 25, 27.

(4.) Cannot break his word. 1 Thess. v. 24. Josh. xxiii. 14. It is confirmed by oath. Ps. lxxxix. 35. Heb. vi. 17. Sealed with the death of the Testator. Heb. ix. 16, 18. Jesus Christ subscribes it with his own blood; and the moment a sinner takes hold of it, he sealeth it upon the heart by his Spirit. Eph. i. 13.

II. Take a view of this covenant, and the faithfulness of God engaged therein, under the similitude of a rainbow surrounding the throne.

1. The rainbow of God's setting. I have set my bow in the clouds. So the covenant of grace is of God's making, Ps. lxxxix. 3; verse 28. Isa. lv. 3.

2. The bow was set in the clouds on God's smelling a sweet savour in Noah's sacrifice. Gen. viii. 20, 22. So here, upon Christ, our blessed Noah, engaging to make himself a sacrifice to justice in our stead,

God smelling a sweet savour in his death, setteth this bow of the covenant in the church.

3. God's bow in the clouds is a security against the waters of the deluge ; a greater security than the sands and rocks. So the covenant of grace, founded and sealed with the blood of the Lamb, is a glorious security, for all who flee to it by faith, against a deluge of devouring wrath. Isa. liv. 9.

4. The rainbow, as naturalists tell us, is a reflection of the rays of the sun. So here it is the Sun of Righteousness that giveth being to this covenant.

5. Though the arch of the bow be high above, and reacheth to the heavens, yet the extremes of it stoop down to earth ; so that, whatever part we are in, it pointeth towards us ; so here, though the head of the covenant be in heaven, yet the covenant itself stoopeth down to earth. Rom. x. 6, 8. Acts xiii. 26.

6. God's bow in the clouds is very extensive, reaching from one end of the heaven to the other ; so God's covenant of grace is large and wide enough to take in all of Adam's race. And yet there is room. Isa. lv. 1, 2.

This bow is said to be round about the throne. This may set forth the glorious majesty of a God in Christ, that it is accessible from every quarter. Show the stability of it, the connexion between all the parts of the covenant ; and there is no access to a throne of grace but by virtue of the covenant.

Inferences :

1. The necessity of fleeing for refuge to the covenant of grace. We are condemned by the covenant of works, exposed to wrath, &c.

2. The encouragement we have to take hold thereof. Ps. lxxviii. 18. Isa. lv. 7.

3. The blessedness of those who have by faith entered within the bow of this covenant : pardon, peace, reconciliation, sanctification, glorification, eternal glorification. Rom. viii. 30.

REGENERATION,

A SOURCE OF THE NOBLEST JOY.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who of his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, &c.—1 Pet. i. 3—5.

THE ungodly may be patient, but are seldom joyful in affliction : their happiness almost entirely dependeth on outward circumstances. But the regenerate have sources of joy peculiar to themselves ; nor can they be in any state wherein they have not abundant cause to bless God. The persons to whom St. Peter wrote were scattered abroad, and in a state of persecution ; yet he beginneth his epistle to them, not in terms of pity and condolence, but of praise and thanksgiving.

I. The causes of regeneration.

Regeneration is a spiritual and supernatural change of heart.

1. The efficient cause of it is God. God, under the Old Testament dispensation, was the God of Abraham; under the gospel, he appeareth under the more endearing title, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is our God and Father also, in and through Christ Jesus: in this relation he is considered as begetting us again. He effecteth, however, this great work by means of his word and Spirit. 1 Pet. i. 23.

2. The moving cause of it is his mercy. God hath not respect to any goodness or merit in the creature; he is actuated only by his own grace and mercy: of this the conversion of a soul is a marvellous display. Well, therefore, is regeneration described as flowing from abundant mercy.

3. The procuring cause is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the procurer of every blessing, whether of grace or glory. Our blessings are generally represented as obtained through his death; but here, as in many other places, they are ascribed to his resurrection: his resurrection enabled him both to intercede for us, and to send the Spirit to us. It is therefore specified as the procuring cause of our regeneration.

4. The final cause or end is our present and eternal happiness. God would have his people enjoy a lively hope here. He hath prepared for them also an inheritance hereafter. This inheritance is unspeakably glorious, not corruptible as earthly treasures, which moth and rust will corrupt; nor defiled, like the earthly Canaan, by wicked inhabitants; nor fading by use, age, or enjoyment, like the pleasures of sense.

II. The security of the regenerate.

Some, even of the regenerate, are ready to doubt whether God will bestow on them the inheritance they hope for. Others fear they shall fall short of it through their own frailty; but God hath secured to them the full and everlasting enjoyment of it.

1. The inheritance is reserved for them: earthly inheritances may be taken away by fraud and violence; not even crowns and kingdoms can boast of any stability; but the saints' inheritance is in heaven: there it is out of the reach of all its enemies: God himself keepeth it for his people as their inalienable right.

2. They are also kept for it: they are weak and helpless in themselves, they are surrounded also with hosts of enemies; but they commit themselves to God by faith: in so doing they interest the power of God on their behalf. God keepeth them, according to his promise. Isa. xxvi. 3, as in an impregnable garrison, unto their full and final salvation.

Inferences:

1. How happy are God's people here! The change they have experienced in regeneration is truly blessed. The prospects they enjoy are bright and glorious: their security enhanceth these blessings. What, then, need they regard in this world? Surely they should rejoice, though in tribulations: let every one, then, when encompassed with troubles, of whatever kind, say, "Blessed be God, who hath begotten me again."

2. How happy will God's people soon be! Their inheritance though at a distance, is a consolation to them; the very hope of it filleth them with joy unspeakable. It will do this even under the heaviest afflictions; what sensations, then, will the full enjoyment of this inheritance excite! What joy will that be when it is without any alloy of sin and sorrow! Let us remember that this salvation is ready to be revealed; let us look for it with holy ardour and eager expectation.

CHRIST, AN ADVOCATE.

We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John ii. 1.

IN the former chapter the apostle lays before us that plenteous redemption which is in Christ, together with the precious virtue and merit of his blood to cleanse from sin, verse 7. And also, in the context, what riches of pardoning grace are in God for poor sinners! These things were not written that we should be more careless, less watchful, &c. but, that we sin not. The end of the gospel-revelation is to put away sin. 1 John iii. 8. Acts xxvi. 18. Rom. viii. 3, 4. For this end Christ came. Titus ii. 13, 14. The gospel is preached. Acts xiv. 15. The Spirit also given. Therefore, if holiness be not the mark towards which we press, we pervert the gospel, we have not learned Christ. Eph. iv. 17, 22. It is a sign of reprobation. Jude, ver. 4. Our condemnation will be just. Rom. iii. 8. Greater than others. John iii. 19. The apostle asserteth respecting every believer, "But if any man sin." Rom. vi. 14. The best of men, in an unguarded hour, may fall by the power of temptation; but let them not despair, we have an Advocate. The office of an advocate is to plead the cause of those who are not able to plead for themselves, and that in a way of justice, and from principles of equity. Christ's office, as an Advocate, is to plead the cause of sinners, who are not able to plead for themselves.

I. Christ is our Advocate.

1. Christ is an Advocate in the superior court. Heb. ix. 24.
2. Christ is qualified for his office. Isa. xlii. 1, 4.
3. A faithful Advocate, the righteous. Heb. ii. 17.
4. An affectionate. Matt. xii. 20.
5. A wise and skilful. 1 Cor. i. 24.
6. Successful.

II. The cause he pleadeth.

1. In general, he pleadeth for sinners.

- (1.) For patience and forbearance towards them. Luke xiii. 8.
- (2.) Their pardon and conversion, Luke xxiii. 34.

2. More especially for his church.

- (1.) That they may be delivered from the evils which are in the world.

John xvii. 15.

- (2.) Upheld in the hour of temptation. Luke xxii. 31, 32.

- (3.) For their perseverance. John xvii. 11.

- (4.) Sanctification. John xvii. 17.

- (5.) Comfort. John xiv. 16.

- (6.) Union. John xvii. 21. And while Christ pleadeth for union above, they should endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit below.

- (7.) Glorification. John xvii. 24.

Reflections:

1. What encouragement for believers to come to a throne of grace! Heb. iv. 15, 16. John xiv. 13, 14.

2. None, however vile, who are coming to God under a sense of that vileness, need to despair. Heb. vii. 25.

THE FOLLY OF A PROFESSION WITHOUT PRACTICE.

Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?
Luke vi. 46.

THE honour of Christ, and the salvation of our souls, depend on our having right views of the gospel; we cannot, therefore, too earnestly insist on the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ; nevertheless, we should constantly urge the practice of good works, as the fruits and evidences of our faith in Christ. The folly of expecting salvation while we neglect them is strongly represented by our Lord in the text.

I. Show who they are that deserve the censure in the text.

The heathens have less to aggravate their sins than Christians. The greater part of those who live in countries that are evangelized are obnoxious to this censure.

1. Merely nominal Christians deserve it. Many are Christ's, as having been devoted to him in baptism: by the appellation of Christians they profess to be his followers, but they are in no respect subject to his will and word. Christ commandeth them to seek first the kingdom of God, &c. and they seek it last.

2. Formal, self-righteous persons deserve it. Many will go far in the outward duties of religion; they will profess, too, a veneration for the name of Christ, but he calleth them to regeneration; John iii. 3; and they deny their need of it. He biddeth them live by faith on him, and it proveth a hard saying. John vi. 53, 60. They are satisfied with the form of godliness, without the power.

3. False professors deserve it: none are so worthy of reproof as they. They will talk much of their dependence on Christ: they will profess, perhaps, to have experienced much of his power and grace: they may even glory in the recollection of his truth and faithfulness; but, in the midst of all, they can be proud, covetous, passionate, censorious, unforgiving, deceitful, and dishonest.

Such persons ought to be addressed with all plainness of speech.

II. Expostulate with them on the folly of their conduct.

The service of God is justly called a reasonable service; but a fruitless profession is most unreasonable: no reason can be assigned why persons should rest in such a state.

1. Is not a conformity to Christ's precepts practicable? many allege, that such strictness as he requireth is unattainable. We allow that absolute perfection is not to be expected in this world; but an unreserved devotedness of ourselves to God is attainable. Thousands of the saints of old have walked thus with God: there is a cloud of living witnesses who exemplify this conduct. God hath promised grace to all who seek it diligently. Matt. vii. 8.

2. Is not obedience to him necessary? We may be good citizens, if we possess only the virtues of heathens; but an unfeigned regard to Christ is necessary to constitute us Christians. St. Paul hath fully declared the inefficacy of outward religion. Rom. ii. 28, 29. Judas, and

the foolish virgins, awfully exemplified it. Matt. xxv. 3, 11, 12. Our Lord hath warned us all respecting the folly and danger of it. Matt. vii. 21, 23.

3. Will not a feigned allegiance be discovered by him! We may easily deceive our fellow-creatures; but every motion of our hearts is visible to Christ. Heb. iv. 13. Nor can the most specious appearances deceive him. John ii. 24, 25. In his final judgment, he will show that he was privy to our most secret thoughts and desires. 1 Cor. iv. 5.

4. Shall we not wish, at last, that we had been sincere and upright? The reproach which attendeth the exercises of real religion may make us satisfied with the form of it at present; but, in the day of judgment, we shall see our folly. Prov. v. 1, 9. We shall not know what to reply to this question then; the vain excuses we now make, we shall not then even dare to offer.

Application:

Let all, then, seek to become Christians indeed. Let us not be afraid to confess our Lord before men: but let our lives be consistent with our professions. Let us trust in the Lord as simply as if obedience were not required. Let us obey the Lord as zealously as if obedience only were required.

JESUS CHRIST, THE MOST EXCELLENT OF ALL TEACHERS.

Never man spake like this man.—John vii. 46.

So said the officers, whom the pharisees and chief priests had sent to take Jesus Christ into custody, assigning this as a reason why they had not executed their commission.

When these officers went to take Jesus Christ, he was standing in the temple, and speaking boldly of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive, when the Holy Ghost should be given, after he was glorified. Very likely our Lord was expounding some of the prophecies; for he said, "if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink: he that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." Verses 37—39.

It must have been very delightful to hear Jesus Christ explain the prophecies, and particularly such as are contained in the 35th and 44th of Isaiah, the 2nd chapter of Joel, and other places, where the Holy Spirit is spoken of under the similitude of a well, or a spring, in the minds and hearts of inspired men. The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life, and Christian knowledge is a well of water springing up into everlasting life. John iv. 14.

Many of the people, when they heard this discourse, were persuaded that the speaker was an extraordinary person, and others thought he was the promised Messiah; many said, "Of a truth this is the Prophet," *i.e.* the Prophet spoken of by Moses. "Others said, this is the Christ." The officers ventured to say, in general, "Never man spake like this

man." We unite these opinions, and affirm, Jesus is the Prophet like Moses ; he is the Christ ; he is the man who spoke as no man ever did speak ; Jesus Christ is the most excellent of all teachers. They who were so happy as to attend his ministry, as it is written in the prophèts, were all taught of God ; and they who are so happy as to hear his doctrine now, though not honoured to hear it from his own lips, may truly say, "Master, we know thou teachest the way of God in truth."—"Blessed is the man, O Lord, whom thou teachest out of thy law," though not out of thine own mouth. Ps. xciv. 13—15.

I. With reference to what he taught.

Jesus Christ had a full and perfect knowledge of what he taught.

1. He understood the subject of religion : herein he differed from those. 1 Tim. i. 4, 6, 7. Acts xvii. 23. Matt. xi. 27.

2. He understood the whole of religion perfectly. His understanding of religion was clear, complete, full, and without any defect ; and there is not, in all his instructions, one line of guess-work. He hath built the whole of the Christian religion on certain principles, beyond all conjecture and peradventure. Hence the scriptures are called lively oracles, the first principles of which were committed to the Jews, and perfected by the apostles. Acts. vii. 38. Heb. v. 12. Rom. iii. 2. Heb. vi. 1. 1 Pet. iv. 10.

3. He knew the perfections of God, the nature of man, the laws of Providence, which govern this world, and all the distributions of happiness and misery which shall take place in the next. Wisdom, in him, was natural, perfect, eternal ; and out of his fulness all receive. If we ask, whence the followers of Christ have their knowledge, the Jews, even priests, captains, and sadducees can tell us. Acts iv. 13. 1 Cor. xv. 10. Gal. ii. 20. 2 Cor. xii. 11.

II. As to the choice of his subjects.

Our heavenly Teacher, out of the rich abundance of his knowledge, made a judicious choice of the subjects of his ministry. He was governed in this by the condition of his disciples. John xvi. 12. As if he had said, I perfectly understand every thing ; but I love you, I know the infancy of your faith, the strength of your temptations, &c. I therefore will adapt my instructions to your present condition. Our Lord hath discovered eminent prudence in the choice of his subjects.

1. The subjects taught by Jesus Christ are strictly and wholly true : he was opposed to those mentioned, Hab. ii. 18. Isa. ix. 15, 17. He taught the perfections, government, and worship of the true God, without mixing the traditions of men.

2. Important. There is nothing trifling, every thing is of the utmost consequence. How important to devotion is the knowledge of God, to the exercise of repentance ; the knowledge of ourselves, for our faith ; the knowledge of the true and real character of Christ : in all these articles Jesus Christ hath instructed us. Our Lord did not waste his time, or the attention of his disciples, about articles of no consequence. John xvi. 21, 22.

3. Propriety. Every thing he taught was proper for him to teach, and suitable for his disciples to learn : were they in danger, he gave them friendly warning ; did they sin, he gave them reproof ; were they in-

quisitive on proper subjects, he poured forth instructions ; and when idle curiosity put them on asking questions, he turned their attention : when they were in trouble, he comforted them ; and when attacked by their enemies, he showed them how to defend themselves. And, though he was always humble, yet he was never mean ; always zealous, never frantic ; always kind, never fond ; always firm, never sour ; always various, yet always the same, as to the choice of his subjects. "Never man spake like this man."

III. The manner.

Plainness and simplicity. There are none of what the apostle calls "great swelling words of vanity ;" no fine terms, taken from the court of Herod. Matt. xi. 4, 5. Ps. lxxii. 1, 4, 6. Matt. xxi. 16. A plainness that could not but be understood by people the most likely to misunderstand it : "Never man spake like this man."

The subjects he taught were stated simply, without mixture, or being rendered abstruse by needless arguments. Prov. viii. 9. All the words of the law were written plainly. Deut. xxvii. 8. Hab. ii. 2. The apostles used plainness of speech. 2 Cor. iii. 12. But, for this excellency, Jesus Christ exceeded all, "and never man spake so plainly as this man."

1. The affecting manner in which he proposeth all his instructions to us. For example, in the parable of the prodigal son, we have the Almighty, who is represented, Nah. i. 3, 5, 6 ; Ps. lxxvii. 18, 19, pictured in one word, *Father*. A Father, patient and silent during all the provocations of a son ; a Father, seeing, when he was a great way off, melting with compassion for him, running, falling on his neck, &c.

2. What a picture of sin and wretchedness doth the life of the prodigal afford ! A son, a son of such a Father, a younger son, going from home, with all his fortune, into a far country, wasting his substance, &c.

3. Repentance, described in a very pathetic manner. "The son came to himself," &c.

4. The joy there is in heaven and in the church, at the repentance of a sinner, is set forth by the pleasure of the servants. All this is not only clear and cold, like a sharp, frosty night, but clear and affecting : "Never man spake like this man."

IV. Consider one excellency more : they were all confirmed by his own example.

Many describe the road to heaven, but tread the way to hell ; but he never did any thing to render his religion suspected ; John i. 14 ; viii. 46 ; hence it is said, "He began to do and to teach." Acts i. 1.

Sum up all these together. A perfect knowledge of all truth ; a wise choice of such truths ; a clear manner of stating them, to carry conviction to the mind, to obtain assent and belief, and affecting the emotions of the heart with piety towards God and love to all men, together with example. Surely, then, we may say, Jesus Christ is the first and most excellent of all teachers. "Never man spake like this man."

CHRIST, OUR MASTER.

One is your Master, even Christ.—Matt.xxiii. 10.

THE scripture saith, Jesus Christ maketh his disciples "kings unto God." It was with the view to raise the apostles to this honour, that our Lord admonished them, in this chapter, to "beware of the pharisees." They pretend to know more of religion than others, taking the title of Rabbi, master, or doctor; and, along with that, dominion over the faith and practice of the common people. "But," saith our Lord to his disciples, "be not ye called Rabbi; and call no man your father upon earth; for one is your Father, which is in heaven; and one is your Master, even Christ."

It is to religion, and to religion alone, that we apply the doctrine of the text, "One is your Master, even Christ." Jesus Christ taught us a perfect religion, perfect in its kind, because it is religion; it wants nothing that a religion ought to have. Thus, our Master differeth from all teachers in the heathen world.

Our Master believed and practised every part of the religion he taught us. This religion is practicable by us; every doctrine may be understood, and every duty performed: our guide commanded us to follow his example, and rested the proof of our love to him on our obedience to his commandments.

To be the more explicit, we may divide Christianity into four parts;

I. The facts recorded in the New Testament.

That there is a God; that he taketh notice of the actions of men; that, in love to mankind, he sent his Son to instruct them. That this illustrious person was born, as the prophets foretold, at the town of Bethlehem, of a virgin of the family of David; that he taught a state of future rewards and punishments, vehemently exhorted mankind to seek the first in a course of virtue, and to avoid the last; that he himself exemplified his doctrine in his own person; that he took a few men under his immediate tuition, left them to instruct mankind after his death, promised them extraordinary assistance; that, having finished his ministry, he was crucified between two thieves; his sufferings were highly acceptable to God, and beneficial to all his followers; that, three days after his crucifixion, he arose from the dead, appeared forty days, and ascended to heaven.

This is a set of facts exhibited by our divine Master, in person, to his disciples; and by them, in their writings, to us. A man whose understanding is governed (as it ought to be) by evidence, examineth these facts, admitteth them to be true, and so yieldeth to what may be called the sole government of Jesus Christ, in regard to the authentic history of his life.

II. The proofs of the truth of these facts.

1. Taken from prophecy, or rather from a comparison of the events which happened in the world with what the prophets foretold should come; the dispersion of the Jews, the persecution of the Christians, &c.

2. Miracles which Christ wrought, which his bitterest enemies never denied; though they were wicked enough to attribute them to the devil.

3. From the lives of the writers of the Bible.

4. The goodness of the doctrine contained.

The Christian who endeavoureth to support Christianity by temporal rewards and punishments, affecteth to be wiser than his Master : but he who dares rest his holy religion on its own rock, entereth into the spirit of the doctrine in the text, "One is your Master, even Christ."

III. The duties of the Christian religion.

The gospel is considered both as a revelation of mercy and an obligation to duty ; if it be the first, gratitude will allow it to be the last.

1. Moral, or the duties we owe to God, to ourselves, and to one another.

2. Positive duties ; *i. e.* such as Christ hath commanded. The Christian who performeth both these kinds of duties acteth like a Christian, only obeying his divine Master.

IV. The motives of the Christian religion.

Our heavenly Director did something more than lay down a plan : he gave it effect, by including in his scheme of happiness such powerful considerations. Had Christ given us only a plan of virtue and happiness, we could never have obtained either. He did this, but he did more : he drew back the veil which hid futurity from our eyes, and brought to our sight the rising of the dead, the coming of the Judge, the happiness of heaven, the misery of the inextinguishable fire ; and so conveyed the force of his doctrine, which rendered it irresistible and glorious.

The man who, unacquainted with these great moving powers, endeavoureth to keep Christianity alive by a few feeble, worldly maxims, doth not enter into the spirit of the text. The Christian filled with these motives, resembleth Mary, who enjoyed all the power of religion by only sitting at the Master's feet. Luke x. 39, 42.

Sum up all these articles, and they amount to this. Christ the Founder of our holy religion, hath ordained as much of his history to be recorded as is necessary for us to know : he hath established the truth of the facts on such proofs as he thought likely to support it ; he hath commanded and exemplified all the duties necessary to be performed by us ; he hath given such weighty reasons for the performance of them, as in his judgment, were equal to the establishment of knowledge, virtue, and happiness. To enter into his views, is to receive him as Master ; to refuse every other director in matters of religion and conscience ; to require no more to make a Christian than he required, is to admit the meaning of this declaration, "One is your Master, even Christ."

Observations :

1. Then we affirm, that there is no need of any other dominion over conscience than what Jesus Christ exerciseth, the dominion of argument, to support the facts of his mission. We may say to every pretender to dominion over us, with Job, xii. 2, 3 ; xix. 4.

2. The exercise of this Christian liberty cannot possibly be an injury to other Christians. Which of the ten commandments does a man break by following his own convictions in religion ? Suppose the worst, that he be in an error ; yet his error remaineth with himself. Our safety is no way endangered by another taking the liberty to think for himself.

It is we who endanger his safety by taking the liberty to think for him. But, say you, God is dishonoured! Imitate his conduct then. Does he thunder? Does he lighten? Does he afflict this poor man? Behold! his sun enlightens his habitation, his rain refreshes his fields, his gentle breeze fans and animates him every day; his revelation lieth open before him, and his throne of grace is ever accessible to him. And will you, rash Christian, mark him out for vengeance? Imitate your heavenly Father, and, at least, suspend your anger till that day. 1 Cor. iv, 5.

3. Free inquiry in religion is essential to the virtue of a character. The virtue of a man consisteth in his making use of his own faculties; not believing other men have made a virtuous use of theirs.

A low, servile soul, habituated not to think for itself, but to be led by a guide, is prepared for the commission of any crime, or the belief of any absurdity.

4. A Christian, who takes Christ for his only sufficient Governor in religion, is supported by the examples of all genuine Christians from the days of Christ; the apostles, the primitive Christians, had no other Master. 2 Cor. i. 24.

Lastly. Let us cherish a spirit of free inquiry. Habituate ourselves to search the scriptures; manifest a generous regard to all good men of every denomination; hear their instructions with mildness, examine with integrity, adopt them with gratitude, or refuse them with civility. Hence we shall rejoice at the prospect of death, when we shall be introduced into the society of all good men, and where benevolence will appear in its fullest exercise. A happiness founded on benevolence resteth on the pillars which support the universe. Gal. vi. 15.

DIVINE INFLUENCES COMPARED TO DEW.

I will be as the dew to Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon, &c.—Hos. xiv. 5—7.

THERE are instances of beautiful imagery in the scriptures, equal to any that can be found in the works of the most renowned authors: they are enhanced, too, by the importance of the subjects they contain. In both respects, the passage before us deserveth peculiar attention. Imagination cannot conceive a richer display of divine blessings, than God here vouchsafeth to his church and people.

Consider,

I. The favour which God will show his people.

1. The metaphor of *dew* is at once simple and sublime. The benefits of the dew are but little known in this climate; but in Judea the metaphor would appear very significant: where the rains are periodical, and the climate hot, the dews are more abundant.

For some time after the creation, dew supplied the place of rain; Gen. ii. 6; and, after the rain was given, it still remained of great use.

The scriptures speak of it as an important blessing. Gen. xxvii. 28. Deut. xxxiii. 13. They represent the withholding of it as a calamity and curse. 2 Sam. i. 21.

2. The communications of God to his people are fitly compared to it. It distils silently, and almost imperceptibly, on the ground; yet, it insinuateth itself into the plants on which it falleth, and thus maintaineth their vegetative powers. In the same manner, God's visits to his people are secret: he comes not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the still small voice. 1 Kings xix. 11, 12; but he gaineth access to their inmost souls. 2 Cor. vi. 16. He cheereth and reviveth their fainting spirits; and thus he fulfilleth to them his own most gracious promise, Isa. lviii. 11.

3. Were his communications refreshing only, and not influential on the conduct, we might be afraid of enthusiasm; but his favour invariably discovereth itself by,

II. Its fruits and effects.

The effects of the dew are seen by the progress of vegetation. The descent of God's Spirit on the soul produceth,

1. Growth. The lily springeth up speedily, but it is of short duration; the cedars of Lebanon cast forth their roots to a great extent: thus the soul, that is refreshed with divine communications; the quickness of its growth often exciteeth admiration. Its stability defieeth the assaults of earth and hell; while it spreads its branches, and displays its vigour in every good word and work.

2. Beauty. There is a peculiar grace and beauty in the olive-tree; and such is there in the soul that communes with God. What a lustre was there on the face of Moses, when he came from the mount! Ex. xxxiv. 30. And how is the lively Christian beautified with salvation! His outward conduct is rendered amiable in every part; his inward dispositions of humility and love are ornaments which even God himself admires. 1 Pet. iii. 4. He is transformed into the very image of his God. Eph. iv. 23, 24. Nor shall his beauty be ever suffered to decay. Ps. i. 3. The olive, as an evergreen, retaineth its beauty; and, in this respect also, is a fit emblem of the true Christian.

3. Fragrance. This is twice mentioned in the text, and therefore deserveth particular notice. Lebanon was no less famous for its odorous vines than for its lofty cedars: and doth not the Christian diffuse a savour all around him? 2 Cor. ii. 14. How animated his discourse when God is with him! How refreshing and delightful to those who enjoy his conversation! Prov. xvi. 24. How pleasing also is it to his God and Saviour! Mal. iii. 16. Cant. iv. 16. In proportion as he liveth near to God, he fulfilleth that duty. Col. iv. 6.

4. Fruitfulness. The corn and the vine are just emblems of the Christian's fruitfulness: they often wear the most unpromising appearance, yet they are revived by the genial influences of the sun and rain. Thus the Christian may be reduced to a drooping or desponding state; but the renewed influences of God's Spirit will revive him. They make him fruitful in all the works of righteousness: they, too, who dwell under his shadow, and are most nearly connected with him, will participate in his blessings. Ps. lxxii. 16.

Inferences :

1. How honourable and blessed is the Christian's state ! Often is he favoured with visits from above ; John xiv. 23 ; and glorious are the effects produced by God upon him ; the whole creation scarcely affordeth images whereby his blessedness may be adequately represented. Who, then, is so honourable ? Who so happy ? Let all endeavour to maintain a sense of their high privileges, and to "walk worthy of the calling wherewith they are called." Eph. iv. 1.

2. How hopeful is the state of those who wait upon God ! The promises in the text were given as an answer to prayer ; and they are made to all who, like Israel, plead with God. If the dew be withheld from others, it shall descend on them. Judges vi. 37, 38. Its descent shall accomplish the utmost wishes of their souls. They shall soon experience the fulfilment of that word, Isa. xl. 31.

THE SPIRITUAL MERCHANT.

For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.—Prov. iii. 14.

IF they are greatly and fatally mistaken, who, as the apostle says, "suppose that gain is godliness ;" they, on the other hand, are not less so, who imagine that there is no gain in godliness ; for the apostle tells us, that "godliness with contentment is great gain, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." 1 Tim. iv. 8.

In what a striking, beautiful, easy, and familiar manner is this truth set before us in the words of the text ! If there were not another in the Bible, this alone is sufficient to prove that real religion and true godliness ought to be, and are, the principal concern of the heart, the constant and daily pursuit of the life and practice of the real Christian. Indeed, the words themselves, without any exposition, naturally and plainly afford and inculcate this truth. We may observe, respecting the connexion of these words, that they are spoken of that wisdom which the apostle James saith "cometh from above." By which is meant, either the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who is made unto all his people wisdom, or the work of the Lord the Spirit on their souls, making them wise unto salvation through faith.

The words of the text are allegorical ; and the allegory, though natural and easy, is not less striking and beautiful than it is important and instructive. In speaking, therefore, upon the subject,

Consider,

I. The real Christian under the character of a merchant ; and show he answers to that character.

We need not hesitate to fix this character on him, inasmuch as our Lord himself hath done it ; Matt. xiii. 45 ; and an allusion seems to this character. Prov. xxxi. 14. Cant. iii. 6. In what respects the real Christian, in his spiritual character and conduct, answereth to this description.

1. A merchant is, and necessarily must be, a living man : so none but spiritual, living, or regenerate persons, are, or can be, spiritual merchants.

2. A diligent man. So the spiritual merchant, Heb. vi. 11. 2 Pet. i. 5.

3. A man of punctuality and despatch ; if either of these are neglected, his character, credit, and trade, will be greatly injured. So the heavenly merchant. Eccl. xi. 6.

4. He must be constant and regular in his correspondence : if this be neglected, all will go wrong. Nor less so will it be with the believer. Luke xviii. 1. 1 Thess. v. 17.

5. Must know and be attentive to the state of his affairs ; and this is best come at by frequent examination, posting and balancing his books. So the believer with respect to his soul.

6. Is a man of a truly honourable and respectable calling. Isa. xxiii.

8. A saint is a truly honourable calling : their connexions and business are honourable ; and their end will be everlasting honour.

7. Is a man of useful calling, the support of a nation. A true believer in Christ is truly useful : "The salt of the earth." Matt. v. 13.

8. A profitable calling. Many find great advantage arising from it : so "godliness is great gain." 1 Tim. vi. 6.

9. Must prepare for, and expect to meet with many trials, difficulties, and losses, notwithstanding his trade may be good. So the spiritual merchant, from storms and tempests : such are all seasons of affliction, temptation, &c. from bad servants, thieves, and robbers, a present evil world, Satan, &c. Ps. cxix. 61 ; Dan. xi. 14 ; from false and pretended merchants ; *i. e.* from formal, hypocritical professors ; from calumny and reproach ; though, at the end, the spiritual merchant shall be the gainer by this.

II. The articles of his trade, or what he dealeth in.

Not in toys or trifles, but the most valuable, glorious, and everlasting realities.

1. He tradeth in gold ; by which we may understand the love and grace of God. Rev. iii. 18.

2. Jewels and pearls ; by which we may understand the Lord Jesus Christ, and all his blessings and benefits. Matt. xiii. 45, 46.

3. Wine and oil : the sweet and gracious influences and comforts of the Spirit. Ps. xxiii. 5. Prov. ix. 4, 5 ; xxi. 20.

4. Pleasant fruits ; even those of the tree of life. Rev. xxii. 2 Cant. ii. 3.

5. Fine linen and goodly apparel. Rev. xix. 8. Isa. lxi. 10.

6. Arms and ammunition ; nor can he carry on his trade without. Eph. vi. 11.

7. Rich and precious spices ; by which we may understand the duties, walk, and practice of evangelical holiness. Cant. iii. 6 ; iv. 13, 14.

III. The stock that he trades with.

He doth not trade with any stock of his own, for he hath none ; wholly with the stock of another, viz. the Lord Jesus Christ. John i. 16.

1. With the love of Christ ; and this is eternal and unchangeable. This is a precious part of his stock. Eph. iii. 19.

2. The power of Christ ; and this is omnipotent and invincible.

Which made the apostle say, Phil. iv. 13. 2 Cor. xii. 9; and such is our weakness, we can do nothing without him. John xv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 5.

3. The wisdom of Christ; hence he is made unto us wisdom. 1 Cor. i. 30.

4. The truth and faithfulness of Christ; this can never change. Isa. liv. 10.

5. The merits and righteousness of Christ; these are infinite, inexhaustible, and invaluable; in the Lord they have righteousness and strength.

6. The offices and character of Christ; Redeemer, Brother, Shepherd, Friend, Prophet.

7. The glorious exaltation and intercession of Christ. 1 John ii. 1.

IV. The port he trades to.

1. A distant port. Isa. xxxiii. 17.

2. A rich port; to which the apostle alludes. Phil. iv. 19. 1 Cor. i.

5. 2 Cor. ix. 11.

3. A safe port. Prov. xxix. 25.

4. A free port; no taxes, no fines, no port charges.

5. A royal port; and all who trade to it are made priests and kings, and receive thousands of royal favours.

6. A heavenly port. Phil. iii. 20.

V. The manner in which his trade is carried on.

1. By books.

(1.) The Bible. There is no doing without this book. 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

(2.) His memory; which is his day-book. The apostle often reminded us of the usefulness and importance of this book. 1 Cor. iv. 17; xv.

2. 1 Tim. iv. 6. 2 Pet. i. 12, 13, 15.

(3.) His judgment; which is his journal. A sanctified judgment is a happy, useful, and comfortable journal to a sanctified memory. Ps. cxix. 66. Prov. xiii. 23. 1 Cor. i. 10. Phil. i. 9.

(4.) His affections; which are his cash-book. Col. iii. 2. Matt. vi. 21.

(5.) His conscience; which is his ledger, where his spiritual accounts are settled. Acts. xxiv. 16. 2 Cor. i. 12.

2. By letters; *i. e.* prayer. There is no carrying on this spiritual trade without.

3. By good bills. It is a great matter for merchants to have good bills. How much is it for the comfort of the believer, to see and know that all those good bills, *i. e.* the promises of the gospel, are regularly drawn, plainly signed, divinely sealed, properly endorsed, will never be refused, but always duly honoured! Hence they need not stagger at the promise.

4. By running cash; by which we may understand sensible comforts, with which God is pleased to favour them.

VI. The profits and gains of his trade.

The profits are inconceivably great. Job xxix. 15, 19. Prov. viii. 11, 19; xvi. 16.

1. It is better than the "merchandise of silver."

(1.) The merchandise of silver is uncertain; this is sure.

(2.) Unsatisfying; Eccl. v. 10; but the heavenly merchandise is satisfying. Ps. lxxiii. 25. Jer. xxxi. 14.

(3.) Is short; James iv. 13, 14; but the heavenly merchandise is long as eternity.

(4.) Is often hurtful; Eccl. v. 13; 1 Tim. vi. 9; but this is beneficial. Prov. xxii. 4.

(5.) Can afford no peace or comfort at death; Ps. xlix. 16, 17. Eccl. v. 15; but this affords the greatest peace and comfort at death.

(6.) Cannot assure a man of heaven; Matt. xvi. 26; but this can assure a man, and give him a blessed foretaste of heaven.

2. "And the gain thereof than fine gold."

(1.) By this spiritual merchandise he gaineth true peace in his conscience. Phil. iv. 7.

(2.) Holiness of heart and life. Luke i. 75. Rom. vi. 22.

(3.) Fellowship and communion with God. 1 John i. 3.

(4.) Comfort and assurance of heaven; and this is better than all the fine gold on earth.

(5.) Victory over death. 1 Cor. xv. 57.

(6.) A glorious and joyful resurrection. Phil. iii. 20, 21.

(7.) Eternal life. Rom. ii. 7.

Conclude by addressing,

I. The real Christian.

1. Be diligent and punctual in the duties of your heavenly trade.

2. Look carefully over, and examine frequently into, and post your books; search the scriptures seriously, constantly, and diligently. Store your memory, your spiritual day-book, with something truly good. Labour after, and pray for a scriptural, established judgment, your spiritual journal. Daily keep your eye and watch over your affections, as a merchant doth his cash-book. Do as Paul did, Acts xxiv. 16, a well-posted ledger, kept free from blots. Keep good circulating bills; *i. e.* the precious promises. Daily ask for needful supplies of running cash.

3. Labour to enlarge your spiritual trade: the more trade the more riches. Rom. xv. 13. Phil. i. 9.

4. Let not trials or difficulties be a discouragement. Matt. xix. 29.

5. Rejoice in prospect of that eternal gain. 1 Pet. i. 9.

II. The Christless sinner.

1. Think of thy miserable and wretched state.

2. Reflect how much precious time is lost.

3. Remember what a dreadful account there will be at the last. Eccl. xi. 9.

4. Remember, it is not too late; thou art yet on mercy's ground; thou mayest obtain mercy. Begin this spiritual merchandise, and gain much in a little time.

THE

FOLLY OF MAKING A MOCK AT SIN.

Fools make a mock at sin.—Prov. xiv. 9.

PROVERBS are short, yet weighty sentences; hence it is observable, that we are not to expect any connexion, either of sense, or sentences, in

this book. Other parts of scripture are like a rich mine, where the precious ore runs along in one continued vein; but this is like a heap of pearls detached, yet of equal excellence and value.

Consider,

1. The character of wicked and ungodly men; they “mock at sin.”

The word *mock*, in scripture, is subject to various acceptations; as,

1. It sometimes signifieth an abusing of others, by violent and lewd actions. Gen. xxxix. 17.

2. An exposing of men to shame and dishonour. Prov. xx. 1.

3. An imposing upon the credulity of other things that seem incredible and impossible. Gen. xix. 14.

4. A failing in our promises, and thereby defeating and frustrating the expectations of others. Matt. ii. 16.

But none of these are applicable to the word in the text. There are two other acceptations of this expression, in either of which the word may be taken.

1. The word *mock* is commonly taken for scoffing, or a bitter taunting at others. Thus, our Saviour suffered the derision of an insolent rabble; Luke xxiii. 11; thus, the blessed martyrs and confessors, that followed his steps. Heb. xi. 36. The difference between a wise reprover and a bitter mocker is, the words of the one are like balm, soft and sanative; but the words of the other are like sharp swords.

2. Mocking may be taken for slighting, or looking upon persons or things as inconsiderable, and unworthy of regard. Thus it is said of the horse, Job xxxix. 22; the leviathan, xli. 29.

How the wicked make a “mock at sin.”

1. When they mock at other men’s sins, so as to turn them into railery; this, indeed, is sport for devils; the damnation of souls is the sport of hell. It is horrid to make those sins thy mirth which will be thy brother’s eternal ruin: how many of this description in the present day, challenge our tears and pity! how sad and doleful a sight, to see so many every where dishonour God, disgrace their natures, and destroy their souls!

There are two things in sin, impiety and folly. We may lawfully enough scorn the one, as Elijah did the idolatrous worshippers of Baal; 1 Kings xviii. 27; while we are sure to hate and detest the other. And a due mixture of both these together, is very fit to enkindle our zeal for God, and may be a requisite temper for him who is to reprove confident and audacious sinners.

2. When they mock at their own sins, so as to think the commission of them a slight and inconsiderable thing. That they account them inconsiderable, will appear from the following things:

(1.) Slight temptations make them sin. A mere gallantry, or humour of sinning, is enough to hurry them into any crime that the devil, or their own wicked hearts, shall suggest.

(2.) They are not easily brought to repent of their sins. The threatenings denounced against the impenitent do not startle them, neither do the promises allure them; or, if they are at all moved with these, they think a slight repentance will make amends for all.

The causes of the wicked making light of sin.

1. Because they see so few instances of God's wrath executed on sinners in this life. Eccl. viii. 11. But be assured the storm is daily gathering, and will burst at the great day of account, with greater violence on the guilty head. Ps. xi. 6.

2. Because it cannot affect God with any real injury. It is true, O sinner! thy sins can never invade God's essence; that is infinitely above the attempts of men and devils; but yet every wicked wretch would, if he could, dethrone God. Sinners would not have him to be so holy, so just, &c. Sinners do really contradict God's purity, rebel against his sovereignty, violate his commands, defy his justice, provoke his mercy, despise his threatenings, and hinder the manifestations of his glory to the world.

II. The folly of such a conduct.

1. To make a "mock at sin," is the most egregious folly and madness.

(1.) To make a "mock at sin," is to make a mock at all the misery sin hath introduced into the world.

(2.) Is to make a mock at the sufferings of the Redeemer.

(3.) Is to make a mock at the misery of the damned in hell.

2. All who "make a mock at sin" justly merit the epithet of fools.

(1.) Because they prefer darkness to light, misery to happiness, bondage to liberty, a chain to a crown, a prison to a palace.

(2.) They make a mock of that which will be their ruin.

To conclude :

1. What an accursed, horrid thing, it is to tempt others to sin, in order to make sport with them, and raise a scene of mirth out of the ruin of their souls : woe to such ! Hab. ii. 15, 16.

2. Think how desperately impious they are, who sin only to make others sport.

3. Be persuaded, therefore, now, to "abhor that which is evil." Deut. xxxii. 29.

THE IDEA OF MOCKING GOD,

THE GROSSEST OF ALL DECEPTIONS.

Be not deceived, God is not mocked.—Gal. vi. 7.

IT is amazing that reasonable creatures should deceive themselves in matters that concern their everlasting interests ; but it is infinitely more astonishing that they should deceive themselves so far as to fancy they can impose upon God himself, or mock him, and escape with impunity. And yet, that they do so, is plainly supposed in the text : "Be not deceived, God is not mocked."

In discoursing from these words,

Consider,

I. In what sense people may be said to mock God.

1. Those may be said to mock God, who take the advantage of secrecy to commit any sin, without fear. Many who are kept within the bounds of modesty, by the restraint of fear or shame, in reference to their fellow-creatures ; yet, when either darkness or solitude favours them,

they give an unbridled loose to their criminal desires and actions, without any fear of God. Isa. xxix. 15.

2. Who cover their wicked purposes with specious pretences to religion and sanctity. Thus Saul; 1 Sam. xv. 20, 21; and the pharisees. Matt. xxiii. 14.

3. Who neglect duties, known duties, upon every slight and vain pretence. Prov. xxiv. 11, 12. James ii. 15, 16.

4. Who perform the duties of religion hypocritically. This is the case with all whose hearts are not engaged. All duties are esteemed by God according to the frame and disposition of the heart. Ps. lxxviii. 36, 37. Isa. xxix. 13. Matt. xv. 8. Ezek. xxxiii. 31. Ps. xxxv. 16.

5. Who confess their sin with sorrow, and solemnly vow a reformation; yet return again to folly.

6. Who rest in partial reformation; forsake some sins, retain others. Matt. xxiii. 23.

7. Who delay serving him at present, from a pretence that they will set about religion at a future period. Mal. i. 3, 13, 14.

8. Who, when they hear his threatenings pronounced against their wickedness, flatter themselves that they shall have peace. Deut. xxix. 19, 20. Ps. i. 6. Matt. xxv. 11, 12; vii. 22.

II. God cannot be mocked; or, none can mock him and escape with impunity.

This will be readily admitted, at least in theory, by every one who believeth in the existence of a Deity.

1. God cannot be mocked, or imposed upon, because he is omniscient. Prov. xx. 27. Ps. cxxxix. 7—12.

2. That none can mock God and escape his vengeance, will appear, if we consider,

(1.) That mocking God is a crime that carrieth in it a practical denial of his omniscience.

(2.) That, notwithstanding the Lord delighteth in mercy, and hath given the penitent sinner every encouragement to turn unto him; yet he is a God of justice, and will be faithful with respect to his threatenings, as well as promises. Jer. xxiii. 5.

(3.) That God is able to inflict the punishment he hath threatened upon those who continue to mock him. To conclude:

1. Seeing God cannot be mocked, or imposed upon; let us seek after uprightness of heart. Reflect that God's eye is on us. John i. 47.

2. Seek after fervour in duty. Matt. vii. 7, 8.

3. Be uniform in our profession. Eph. vi. 18. Prov. xxviii. 9. Ps. xxvii. 4.

THE HAPPINESS OF POSSESSING A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE.

Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.—Acts xxiv. 16.

THE gospel is often represented as unfavourable to morality; but true believers are living monuments of its sanctifying influence. St. Paul

was deemed a fellow not worthy to live upon the earth; he was accused of sedition, heresy, and profaneness, verses 5, 6; but he distinctly and satisfactorily disproved the allegations: sedition, verse 12; heresy, verses 14, 15; profaneness, verses 16—18. And he boldly affirmed, that his principles had quite an opposite effect.

Consider,

I. What are we to understand by “a conscience void of offence?”

A metaphysical inquiry into the nature of conscience would be to little profit; its office is to testify the quality of our actions, and to regulate our conduct agreeably to some standard of right and wrong. It regards actions rather than sentiments, and the good or evil that is in them, rather than any prudential considerations respecting them. The rule whereby it should judge is the word of God; and it is considered as good or evil, according to the verdict it gives.

1. Not that it is void of offence merely because it does not accuse. There are many so immersed in cares or pleasures, that they never reflect on the state of their souls; Hos. vii. 2; and, if at any time their conscience be alarmed, they instantly endeavour to check its clamour and restore its tranquillity. Others persuade themselves that they have no cause for fear, and that they shall have peace, notwithstanding all their sins. Jer. viii. 11. Deut. xxix. 19. Others have, by resisting, quenched the light within them; and thus have reduced themselves to a state of awful obduracy. 1 Tim. iv. 2. Such persons have no other than an evil conscience.

2. Nor is a conscience necessarily void of offence, even though it should approve. Many propose to themselves a false standard of right and wrong; by conforming to their own principles, they may gain the approbation of their own minds; but it does not, therefore, follow that they are innocent. Their mistakes cannot change the quality of their actions. Error may extenuate, but cannot remove their guilt. Compare Acts viii. 3; ix. 1; with 1 Cor. xv. 9, and 1 Tim. i. 13, 15.

3. To be truly void of offence, conscience must have a clear discovery of the rule of duty. The rule of duty is concise and plain. Matt. xxii. 37—40. This, however, though allowed in theory, is practically denied. Men persuade themselves, that the love of the world will consist with their duty to God; 1 John ii. 15; and that pride, envy, selfishness, &c. may accord with love to man. How should conscience, thus blinded, give a just verdict? Or how should its blindness cause that to be good which is in itself evil?

4. It should be able also to testify, upon good grounds, that there is a correspondence between that rule and our actions. It should be in the habit of examining our principles and motives, and be on its guard against any bias from prejudice or passion. It should be able to appeal to God for the truth of its testimony; that, after the strictest search, it can find no sin habitually indulged, or duty allowedly neglected.

II. That every true Christian labours to maintain it.

1. This is certainly the character of one who feareth God. The world are satisfied with gaining the applause of men; but the Christian maketh but little account of man's judgment. 1 Cor. iv. 3. He knoweth that the eye of God is upon his heart, Heb. iv. 13, he therefore stu-

dies to approve himself to God. He hath respect to every part of his duty, toward God and man. James iii. 17, and this, not at certain seasons only, but always.

Nor will he be deterred by any regard to ease, or interest, or fear: inquiring only, "What is duty?" He will say with the apostle, Acts xxi. 39.

2. Nor can any one be a true Christian who hath not attained it. Every pardoned sinner is supposed to be without guilt. Ps. xxxii. 2. All in the primitive church are spoken of in this light. Phil. i. 10; ii. 15. 1 Thess. v. 23. St. Paul did not hesitate to affirm, that this was his character; Acts xxiii. 1. 2 Cor. i. 12; and the same is ascribed to one who was far inferior to him. John i. 47. Nor is any one in a state of salvation who hath not attained it. Many things may conspire to rob a Christian of the comfort of such a conscience; but a just ground for such a conscience he cannot but possess. This is expressly asserted by David, Ps. lxxvi. 18; and St. John, 1 John iii. 8—10.

Application:

We all are willing to believe ourselves real Christians; and it is painful to rob any one of so comfortable a hope.

Let us, as Christians, unite our acknowledgments to God. Ps. ciii. 1—5.

Let us adore him for that grace whereby he enableth us to maintain always, and in all things, "a conscience void of offence." But if in this appeal to him, we feel misgivings, or conscience suggest an opposite testimony, let us remember that admonition, 1 John iii. 20, 21.

HUMILITY, THE BEST PREPARATIVE TO RECEIVE CHRIST.

Zaccheus, make haste, and come down.—Luke xix. 5.

OUR Lord Jesus Christ is such a wonderful physician, that he hath a salve for every sore, a remedy for every malady, and a cure for every case that any sinner can on earth possibly be in. In the close of the preceding chapter, we find him miraculously healing Bartimeus of his bodily blindness; and here, in the beginning of this chapter, we find him curing Zaccheus of his spiritual blindness. Bartimeus was a poor man sitting by the way-side begging, and he is mercifully raised up to be effectually cured of his disease. Zaccheus was a rich man, sitting very high on a tree, by the way-side, gazing, and he is mercifully brought down to be effectually cured of his disease. Whether people be in high or low circumstances, there is suitable help and relief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Zaccheus, though by nature a gentile, a publican, chief among the publicans, and rich: therefore, the narrative is introduced with a "Behold:" for "Zaccheus sought to see Jesus," verse 3. Christ coming to the place, calls him by name, "Zaccheus, make haste, and come down."

I. Notice some of those heights, from which we must come down, if we would answer the gospel-call.

1. We must come down from our high thoughts and towering imaginations. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

2. Natural effects, or legal endeavours, Rom. v. 6; x. 3.

3. From the height of our false maxims concerning God. Ps. l. 21.

4. Of false hopes. Job viii. 13.

5. Of worldly props and carnal confidence. Jer. ii. 37. Hos. xiv. 3.

6. Vain apologies, or excuses for our sin. Gen. iii. 12. James i. 13. Luke xviii. 11.

II. In what respects; or the steps by which we must come down, if we would answer the gospel-call; and to what place or situation we must come.

1. By what steps:

(1.) The first step is consideration. Ps. cxix. 59. Isa. i. 3. Hag. i. 5.

(2.) Concern. Acts xvi. 30.

(3.) Despair and disappointment. Jer. ii. 37; iii. 23.

(4.) Resolution. Luke xv. 18. Hos. ii. 6, 7.

2. To what place or position:

(1.) To self-denial. Matt. xvi. 24.

(2.) To gospel-terms of life and salvation. Isa. lv. 1.

(3.) To God's righteousness. Rom. iii. 20, 21.

III. Offer some remarks on the day of conversion.

1. It is a particular day, wherein the Lord calleth us as it were by name. Isa. xliii. 1.

2. A day of despatch: "Make haste, and come down." Gen. xix. 17. Heb. iii. 15.

3. Of love and kindness. Ezek. xvi. 6. Jer. ii. 2. Hos. xi. 4.

4. Of union between Christ and the soul: "To-day I must abide at thine house." Rev. iii. 20. A day of the soul's espousals. Hos. ii. 19, 20.

IV. The reasons why the Lord calls us to come down, and that with haste.

1. Why we must come down:

(1.) Because it is God's great end in the dispensation of the gospel. Isa. ii. 11—17.

(2.) Because when we ascend too high we are in danger. 1 Pet. v. 5.

(3.) That free grace may be exalted in our salvation. Rom. iii. 27.

(4.) That we may meet with Christ. Isa. lvii. 15.

2. Why we must make haste to come down:

Time is hastening, the day of salvation is hastening, death is making haste, judgments are making haste, eternity is making haste. Rev. x. 5, 6. Christ is calling us to make haste.

Inferences:

1. How high and haughty man is by nature!

2. Hence the reason of God's dispensations to humble man.

3. See the nature of true faith, it is a coming down.

4. Admire the riches of God's goodness towards us: "To-day I must abide at thine house." Heb. iii. 7.

PERSEVERANCE IN RELIGION, THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

Faint, yet pursuing.—Judges viii. 4.

A FIT motto this for the arms of a Christian ; descriptive of the fatigue he endureth, and of his resolution to persevere. Though the words relate to quite another matter, yet they may, without any impropriety, be accommodated to the great purpose of animating us to the duties of our Christian profession.

I. Briefly describe the Christian's warfare.

The life of a real disciple of Jesus is frequently thus represented in scripture. 1 Tim. i. 18 ; vi. 12. 2 Tim. ii. 3. He is engaged in the cause of God and Christ ; of truth and liberty. His enemies are, the devil, 1 Pet. v. 8 ; the world, evil passions and corruptions ; enemies numerous, subtle, powerful, who give no quarter. If they cannot conquer, will do their utmost to afflict, distress, torment ; the conflict is often fierce and violent. Christ is the Captain under whom he fighteth ; his weapons are, "the shield of faith," &c. the object is the overthrow of sin.

A noble warfare this, and shall, in the issue, be crowned with joy, &c.

II. The various temper and conduct of the Christian ; the reason of his many discouragements on the one hand ; and of his resolution to persevere, on the other. "Faint, yet pursuing."

1. View him as he is, sometimes faint and spiritless. The most intrepid soldier may on some occasions, tremble ; and the man whose constitution is the most robust and healthful, cannot always boast an exemption from faintness. No wonder that such, at certain intervals, is the sad experience of the Christian, in regard to the concerns of religion. His hands are feeble, and his soul melts like wax ; his spirit languisheth, and his spirit faileth ; and this may, perhaps, be ascribed,

(1.) To the past toils and labours he has endured.

(2.) To the want of proper refreshment. 1 Sam. xiv. 31. The apostle was just at the point of fainting. 2 Cor. xii. 9.

(3.) Through the dread of being overcome. 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

2. Resuming his wonted courage, and, in the strength of divine grace, resolving to pursue. He will not ignominiously submit : no ; he will keep the field, maintain the conflict, push the victory. A brave resolution. He considereth what will be the consequence of submitting, on the one hand, and of pursuing, on the other.

In order to animate the timorous in the pursuit, reflect,

1. What will be the effect, should you throw down your arms, yield to the enemy, and apostatize from your profession ?

(1.) You will lose the advantage you have already gained. 2 John 8. Gal. iii. 3, 4 ; iv. 15 ; v. 7.

(2.) Be overcome ; and here shame and misery present themselves to your view. This ought to excite to action. Luke xiv. 29, 30. Matt. xii. 43—45. 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. Heb. x. 26—29.

2. In order to quicken and enliven, amidst the fatigues and dangers of this spiritual war, consider,

1.) The goodness of the cause in which you are engaged ; the cause of God. It is called, “a good fight of faith.” 1 Tim. vi. 12.

2.) The seasonable and effectual support you may depend on receiving. 2 Kings vi. 15, 16. Isa. xli. 10. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Isa. liv. 17. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. Ps. lx. 12.

Christ is also your Captain ; and in his character, conduct, and example, you have every possible encouragement. Matt. xii. 20.

You may also notice your weapons ; you need not to meet the enemy naked. Eph. vi. 10—18.

3. The triumph that shall succeed ; the prospect of this should animate you. Rev. xxi. 7.

Inferences :

1. That undisturbed rest and tranquillity are not to be expected here.

2. That the Christian may be reduced very low, but not be overcome.

3. Let those who have as yet felt little faintness in their conflict, take heed how they presume. Isa. xl. 29, 30.

Lastly. Ever remember the encouragement you have to pursue. Clad in armour of proof, led by a Captain of unconquerable magnanimity, supported by a numerous body of saints, all shouting, “The sword of the Lord and his Christ !” angels waiting for the event, and a cloud of witnesses, on every side, marking your conduct ; and you yourselves pouring out incessant cries to heaven to prosper the enterprise : thus advancing, relying on the power and faithfulness of God, what have you to fear ? Victory, complete victory shall crown the day ; be persuaded, therefore, “though faint, yet to pursue.”

THE LAW AND GOSPEL CONTRASTED.

The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
John i. 17.

It was acknowledged to be an honour to the Jewish nation that they had received the Law ; and also to Moses who had been a messenger of it ; but the Redeemer, whom we celebrate, is worthy of much affection ; for, “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”

Consider,

I. The ministry of the Law.

1. The Law may be considered as a ministry of rigour, as opposed to grace. Man knew neither himself nor his God : it was necessary, therefore, to discover to him his misery and his duty. This was the end which God proposed in the ministry of the Law. The ministration of the Law was well calculated to answer this end ; God awfully displayed his own majesty on mount Sinai ; and, by the perfect Law which he promulgated, he showed at once what a creature ought to do, and what a sinner must expect. And while, by the ceremonial Law, he declared the necessity of an atonement, he loaded the Israelites with an insupportable yoke of ceremonies, enforcing the observance of them by the severest penalties ; and gave just such a portion of his Spirit as might

enable them to see their guilt and misery, and dispose them to receive the promised Messiah.

2. It may be considered also as a ministry of shadows, as opposed to truth; it held out promises of what was afterwards to be accomplished. Gen. iii. 15; xlix. 10. Deut. xviii. 15. It exhibited in types the mercies which God had in reserve for them. It imparted the beginnings of that salvation which was to be afterwards more largely bestowed. Yet, it could only be called Law, because, however the grace of the gospel was blended with that economy, the legal part was predominant.

3. The author, or dispenser of this Law, was Moses: God indeed was the first and principal author of this Law; Moses was only the mediator, by whom God dispensed it: nor as a mediator, was he real, but only a typical mediator. To prevent entirely the idea of his being really the mediator of the covenant, Divine Wisdom has recorded his sins and failings. And it is worthy of observation that the priesthood was assigned, not to him, but to his brother Aaron: and that not he, but Joshua, had the honour of leading the Israelites into Canaan.

4. As the dispenser of it, he was greatly honoured by God; he was the interpreter of the Israelites to God, and of God to them. Ex. xx. 19. He was employed to show forth the mighty power of Jehovah: he was inspired to transmit in writing the history of his own nation.

II. The ministry of the Gospel.

Grace and truth are here put for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. The gospel is called grace, in opposition to the rigours of the law: God manifested himself in it, not as on mount Sinai, with thunderings, but in a gentle manner, under a veil of human flesh. In it he revealeth his mercy and parental love. It is his free gift, according to his own good pleasure. It is accompanied with a divine efficacy to the souls of men. It operateth on us, not enthusiastically, but in a rational manner.

2. It is called truth, in opposition to falsehood: it is not erroneous, like the religion of the heathens: it is not unsatisfactory and uninteresting, like philosophy: it is not transitory, as earthly things are: it is the accomplishment of what existed only in promises before: it is the substance of what was before exhibited in types. Heb. x. 1: it is the completion of what, under the Law was only begun. Rom. viii. 15.

3. The author of this gospel was Jesus Christ. He, like Moses, was an interpreter between God and men. His ministry, also, like Moses', was accompanied with miracles; he moreover caused his gospel to be written for a perpetual rule.

4. As such he was honoured infinitely above Moses. Moses was only the dispenser of the law, but Christ was the author of grace and of truth. Moses did not procure the covenant of which he was mediator; whereas, the covenant of grace was given, not only through Christ, but on his account. Moses could only report God's will to men; but Jesus Christ both reported it to them, and became a guarantee for their performance of it. Moses was not the source, nor even the dispenser of the Spirit that accompanied the legal economy; but Christ communicateth the Spirit out of his own fulness. John i. 16. Moses wrought miracles by a foreign power; but Jesus Christ by his own. Moses was established over God's house as a servant; but Jesus Christ as a Son, *i. e.* Master and Heir over his own house.

To conclude. Let us,

1. Bless God for Jesus Christ.
2. Cheerfully receive and consent to his gospel, that revealeth to us this grace.
3. Come to this Jesus, that we may receive out of his fulness. John i. 16.

SALVATION WITHOUT HUMAN MERIT.

Nevertheless, he saved them for his Name's sake.—Ps. cvi. 8.

How this people had sinned we are told in the preceding verses; and how the Lord saved them we are told in the text. And in our salvation also God proposeth, that the “loftiness of man should be brought down, and the Lord alone exalted.” If we are now saved by Christ, we have been made sensible of our sin and misery; and been brought to acknowledge, that, “nevertheless, he saved us for his Name's sake.”

Inquire,

I. What is the Name of God, for the sake of which he saves.

1. By the Name of God we may understand his being, or God himself. Deut. xxviii. 58. And to save for his Name's sake, is to save for his own sake. Isa. xliii. 25.

2. By the Name of God we may understand his attributes.

(1.) His power; and to save for his Name's sake, is to make known his power. Compare Ex. ix. 16; and Rom. ix. 17. Abraham's faith fixed here. Rom. iv. 21.

(2.) Mercy. Mic. vii. 18. Ex. xxxiv. 6. Hence the Psalmist prays, Ps. vi. 4; lxxix. 8.

(3.) Wisdom. 1 Sam. ii. 3. Ps. xxxi. 3.

(4.) Truth and faithfulness. Micah vii. 20. Rom. iii. 25.

(5.) Justice. Ps. cxliii. 11. 1 John i. 9.

(6.) Holiness. Ex. xv. 11. Ezek. xxxvi. 21, 22.

3. By the Name of God we may understand the Christ of God. Ex. xxiii. 21; xxxiv. 7. Acts iv. 12.

II. What is implied in God saving for his Name's sake?

1. It implies that his Name is the motive whence he saves. John iii. 16.

2. That his Name's sake is the reason why he saves. Deut. vii. 7, 8.

3. That he makes his Name the matter of his people's salvation; it is their strong tower. Isa. xlv. 17. Hos. xiii. 9. Ps. xviii. 2.

4. The means. John xiv. 7. Acts iv. 12.

5. The measure. 1 Kings viii. 56. Josh. xxi. 45. 1 Cor. x. 13.

6. The end. Eph. i. 6. Isa. xliii. 21. A manifestation of his name. Rom. iii. 25. A vindication. Ps. li. 4. The exaltation. Ps. xlv. 10; cxviii. 16. Isa. xii. 4; xxx. 18. The pleasure. Micah vii. 18. Eph. i. 5. 2 Thess. i. 11. The aggrandizing. Luke ii. 14. The eternizing. Isa. lv. 13. Ps. civ. 31. Rev. vii. 11, 12.

III. Show what salvation the Lord works for his Name's sake.

1. Temporal; as in verses 9, 11, 21, 22, 43, 46.

2. Spiritual; it is for his Name's sake he justifies and pardons. Isa.

xlili. 25. Adopts. Eph. i. 5. 1 John iii. 1. Sanctifies. 1 Cor. i. 30. Carries on the good work. Jer. xxxii. 40.

3. Eternal. Ps. lxxxiv. 11. Rom. vi. 23. Luke xii. 32.

IV. What is implied in "nevertheless, he saved them."

1. That he saved Israel, notwithstanding their dreadful sins. Verses 6, 7, 13, 14, 16, 19, 31.

2. That he saves, for his Name's sake, penitent sinners, notwithstanding their guilt. Isa. i. 18. Been long accustomed to do evil. Num. xiv. 11. Ps. iv. 2. Prov. i. 22; vi. 9. Jer. iv. 14. Apostatised from him. Jer. iii. 1, 14. Contempt of God. Isa. xliii. 23, 25.

Inferences:

1. That this doctrine gives no encouragement to sin. Rom. vi. 1, 2.

2. What encouragement for us to come unto God, and to hope in his mercy. Jer. xiv. 7. Ps. cxxx. 4.

3. Adore the name of the Lord. Ps. viii. 1; xlviii. 9.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF KNOWING THE GOSPEL.

Blessed are the people that know the joyful sound.—Ps. lxxxix. 15.

EVERY man naturally seeks his own happiness; but few seek it in the way that David did. Ps. iv. 6. Nevertheless, experience proves that the world cannot make us happy; nor can any thing but the knowledge and enjoyment of God; that cannot fail to make us truly happy.

Consider,

I. What we are to understand by the joyful sound.

By the joyful sound mentioned in the text we may understand the sound of the gospel.

1. A joyful sound of liberty. Isa. xxvii. 12. Jer. iii. 12, 14.

2. Rest. Matt. xi. 28.

3. Peace. Luke ii. 9, 14. Rom. v. 1.

4. Of a rich and splendid feast. Ps. lxxxix. 3. Isa. xxv. 6. John vi. 55. Ps. xxxiv. 8.

5. Of triumph. Ps. xlvii. 1, 3. John xvi. 33. Isa. liv. 17.

6. Of a marriage. Rev. xix. 7. Hos. ii. 16, 19. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

7. Of an eternal rest with God. 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.

II. What is implied in knowing it.

1. That we hear and attend to it. Isa. lv. 2, 3. Ps. lxxxv. 8.

2. Understand it. John vii. 17.

3. Believe it. John xii. 36; xx. 31. Acts xxiv. 14. Heb. iv. 2.

4. Love and respect it. 2 Thess. ii. 10. Job xxiii. 12. Ps. cxix. 72, 162. 1 Pet. ii. 2.

5. Practise it. 1 Pet. i. 15, 17. Rom. vi. 17.

6. That we have an experimental knowledge of its great Author. 1 Thess. i. 5. Job xxii. 21. John xvii. 3.

III. Their blessedness.

1. They are blessed with the favour of God. Verse 14. 1 Pet. i. 9. Col. i. 13. Acts xxvi. 16, 18.

2. Union with Christ. 1 Cor. vi. 17. Eph. iii. 17. Gal. ii. 20.
3. Spiritual life. John vi. 63. 1 John v. 11.
4. Adoption. John i. 12. Gal. iv. 6.
5. Peace and joy. Rom. xv. 13. Isa. lxi. 10. Rom. v. 2.
6. Eternal life. John iii. 15; xvii. 3. Matt. xxv. 34.

Application :

1. To those who know not the joyful sound : alas ! what blessedness do you lose ! Cease to disregard the joyful sound of the gospel. A true experience of the gospel salvation may yet be obtained ; seek it earnestly, and it will make you inconceivably happy.

2. To those who know and enjoy the gospel : while you taste the blessedness, you must show forth the power of the gospel. You, above all, are bound to be holy in heart and life ; to exert yourselves in every good work. 2 Pet. i. 5, 8.

GOD IS LOVE.

God is love.—1 John iv. 8.

WHAT is God ? is a question of considerable importance, and has had the attention of the learned for many ages. It is, however, only in the scriptures that a proper answer to this question can be found. Here we are informed that he is a Spirit, that he is Light, and that he is Love. The two first of these relate to what he is in himself ; but the last, to what he is to us. He is not only loving and lovely, but love itself, love in his nature, and in all his various operations.

Love is a gentle, pleasing passion : it is the cement of society, and the great source of social happiness. It is the highest beam of divinity that ever shone upon the creation, and the nearest resemblance to the ever-blessed God ; for God is love.

Prove what is here asserted.

It will appear to be true,

I. If we take a view of the many blessings which we constantly receive from our Heavenly Father ; it is in him that we live, and move, and have our being ; he daily loads us with benefits, he crowns us with loving-kindness and tender mercies. But, above all, this appears from the gift of his Son Jesus Christ. John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 9. O Almighty Love ! what hast thou done ! what wonders hast thou wrought ! it was love that caused the Lord of life and glory to suffer and die for those who had, by sin, rendered themselves liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell hereafter. In the death of Jesus, this truth is more clearly perceived. Let us therefore briefly survey the blessings which flow to mankind through this glorious channel.

1. One blessing is reconciliation with God. 2 Cor. v. 19. It was love that provided a ransom ; and it was love that accepted the ransom which it found. Eph. ii. 14, 16. Job xxxiii. 24.

2. The various promises which are given to believers. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 27. Jer. xxxii. 39. Whatever promises are to be found in the

word of God, whether of pardon, peace, happiness in this world or the next, all these tend to prove what is here asserted, God is love.

3. This appears also from the patience and forbearance which are exercised towards sinners. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" Reason, scripture, and experience, plainly declare he has not: hence his expostulations, Mic. vi. 3. Isa. v. 4. Hence he declares, John v. 40. Matt. xxiii. 37. He is represented as waiting, and as though he were unwilling to take a refusal. Rev. iii. 20.

But, as it is so evident, from these observations, that what is here asserted is a fact, we may observe,

II. That whether we take a view of the power, and holiness, or the justice of God, he will still appear to be love.

1. His power. The Almighty creating the world was to display his love. We live in a part of the universe where there is an endless variety of beings, all capable of deriving different degrees of happiness from that inexhaustible fountain, the love of God. When, therefore, we view God as the Creator and Preserver of all things, animate and inanimate, then let us say that he is love. Job xxvi. 8. Isa. xl. 12, 15. Job xxvi. 14.

2. His holiness. Holiness is the health of every rational being. It is not arbitrary in God to establish an inseparable connexion between holiness and happiness. His commands are exceeding broad, and that is because he loves us. If sinners were to be admitted into heaven in an unrenewed state, it would be a curse to the world at large. His taking so much care to make man holy is, therefore, but a taking so much care to promote the public good.

3. His justice. This is not that tremendous thing that ungodly sinners say it is; what it is itself, and what ungodly men make it, are two different things. His justice is that attribute by which he executes those threatenings which his laws denounce. These are never executed but only in a desperate case, only on those who fit themselves for destruction. Good laws are necessary for the prevention of sin; and whatever prevents sin, prevents misery. We, therefore, conclude that the execution of these laws is a display of love and benevolence.

Inferences:

1. Learn what an unnatural thing the enmity of the heart against God is! It is enmity against love.

2. The dreadful state of sinners; it is not a capricious delight in torture that condemns them, but love itself.

3. All the acts of the Deity may be resolved into the benevolent principle of love. God is love; and, therefore, he made the world, preserves it, gave us his Son Jesus Christ, demands the obedience of his creatures, punishes sinners in hell.

4. Prize the gospel which gives us this information of the Divine Being.

5. Let all his creatures endeavour to love him. Ps. ciii. 20, 22. Matt. xii. 37.

THE

RESURRECTION OF CHRIST ATTESTED.

He is risen.—Matt. xxviii. 6.

THE resurrection of Jesus Christ is an event of equal, if not of more importance to us, than his nativity. Though it is certain that the one could not have taken place without the other; and though many things at his birth, in his life, and at his death, gave the strongest indications that he was the Messiah, the only begotten Son of God; yet, had he not risen from the dead, all these things would have been vain, and we must have remained in our sins. But we are assured he did rise, that he who had power to lay down his life, had power to take it up again: and, therefore, we have as much reason to rejoice at his resurrection as the heavenly host had at his birth.

I. Prove the resurrection of Christ: He is risen.

This supposes,

1. That he was dead. Malefactors executed in the Roman manner, *i. e.* on the cross, are, in general, a long time before they die; therefore, to hasten their death, the judge causes their legs to be broken, because, according to the ceremonial law, the land was defiled with those that were hanged, if not timely buried. The certainty and reality of our Saviour's death was confirmed by three descriptions of persons: the Jews, John xix. 31; the soldiers, verses 32, 33; and, to make sure work, one of them thrust a spear into his side, verse 34; and St. John, the beloved disciple, verse 35.

2. That he was buried. This was an act performed by two of his friends, Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, and one that sat on the bench when Jesus was condemned; Luke xxiii. 50, 56; and Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. One might have thought this was a most dangerous season to show any love for Christ, especially by two eminent Jews; but, as they never had made any open profession of him, this was the only public opportunity they had to testify their attachment to him, especially when his apostles had forsaken him and fled. No doubt they were often with him before in private.

3. That he lay under the power of death for a season; this was to fulfil prophecy. Hos. vi. 2. A type. Matt. xii. 40. And his own word. John ii. 19. When, therefore, he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them. Luke xxiv. 8.

He is risen. Is evident,

1. From the authority of angels. Luke xxiv. 4, 6.

2. From the testimony of his disciples. John xx. 13, 17. The same day he manifested himself to ten, and afterwards to the eleven apostles, as they sat at meat. Mark xvi. 14. He was also seen of about five hundred brethren at once.

3. From the evidence of the Roman soldiers, who watched the sepulchre. Matt. xxviii. 2—4. The consternation and dread they experienced forced this truth from their lips; for they fled to the city, and

showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done, and they bribed them with money to deny the fact. Verses 11, 15.

4. From his sending the Holy Ghost. Jesus promised his disciples this gift previous to his death. John xv. 26; xvi. 7. He renewed it after his resurrection, before his ascension. Luke xxiv. 49. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, the apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost. Acts ii. 1, 4.

II. The end for which he rose.

1. That he might be powerfully declared to be the Son of God. Rom. i. 4. This he asserted in the days of his flesh, and now proved it by his rising again. John x. 18. Which glorious act is an evident demonstration of his Divine nature, or, God manifest in the flesh.

2. That it might be manifest that he had magnified the law, and satisfied Divine justice. Jehovah sending an angel to roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, was a plain indication that Jesus had answered the demands of the law, and that he was now at liberty to come forth. It is wrong to detain a prisoner after having made satisfaction.

3. That he might be a Prince and a Saviour. Acts v. 29, 32. As a Prince, he spoiled principalities, Col. ii. 15; and, as a Saviour, he is able to save. Heb. vii. 25. Jesus will be a Saviour to none to whom he is not a Prince. We must submit ourselves to his ruling power, as well as commit ourselves to his saving mercy.

4. That he might be the first-fruits. 1 Cor. xv. 20. The term first-fruits is metaphorical, alluding to the oblation of the first-fruits in the Levitical law: they were offered both as an acknowledgment that the whole crop was God's, and as a pledge and assurance of their enjoying the whole from God. As sure as the whole harvest follows the first-fruits, so sure shall the saints' resurrection follow the resurrection of Christ, as an effect follows its proper cause. Christ was the first that rose never to die more, the first that rose by his own power, the first that rose to give others a pledge and assurance of their rising after him, and of their rising like unto him. Col. i. 18. Phil. iii. 21.

5. That he might be Judge both of quick and dead. Acts x. 42. Jesus Christ, by virtue of his meritorious passion and glorious resurrection, was constituted Lord of all things. Rom. xiv. 9, 10. And hath power to judge all persons. Matt. xxv. 31. 2 Cor. v. 10. Yea, he will be found such a Judge as the power of the mightiest cannot daunt; as the riches of the wealthiest cannot bribe; as the subtlety of the wisest cannot elude. And such a Judge as there is no appealing from, no repealing of his sentence.

III. The benefits which accrue to us thereby.

1. Christ being risen, we are saved from sin through him. Matt. i. 21. Rom. iv. 25.

2. The Holy Spirit is given to his church. John xiv. 16, 17. 1 Cor. vi. 19.

3. Our resurrection is secured. 1 Pet. i. 3. 1 Thess. iv. 14, 16.

4. Heaven is secured to us. John xiv. 1, 3. Matt. xxv. 34.

5. Eternal life is ours. John iii. 36; vi. 54; xiv. 19.

Inferences:

1. What a blessed thing is the resurrection of Christ!

2. Christ having conquered death, this should comfort us against the fear of it. Jesus triumphed over death in his own territories, so shall we through him. John v. 28, 29.

3. What a glorious hope the Christian hath! 1 Pet. i. 3, 9.

4. Seeing all power is given to Christ in heaven and in earth, we may repose the greatest confidence in him. 2 Tim. i. 12. Job xix. 25, 27.

5. If we be risen with Christ, if we have been buried with him by baptism into his death, we shall be raised in the likeness of his resurrection. Rom. vi. 3, 6.

THE CONDEMNATION OF SINNERS

AGGRAVATED, IN PROPORTION TO MERCIES RECEIVED.

The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, &c.—Matt. xii. 41.

THE gospel of Christ is the greatest blessing ever bestowed on guilty mortals, when received and improved, and will eventually become the greatest judgment, when despised and neglected. Thus the apostle, 2 Cor. ii. 16. The threatening in the text was levelled against the Jewish pharisees, &c. who enjoyed Christ's present ministry: it is applicable to all others into whose ears the gospel trumpet shall have been sounded. Luke x. 10, 16. John xiii. 20. Those who enjoy the gospel dispensation, and are not by it rendered better in heart and life, will find an aggravation of guilt and misery, and those who have been reformed by less means, will stand evidences in judgment against them. The text.

Consider:

I. The character of Jonah, his preaching, and the repentance of the Ninevites.

1. Character. He was not only a man of like passions, Acts xiv. 15, sufferings it means with ourselves, but, what seemeth strange in a good man, he was peevish, fretful, and unwilling to comply with the divine command in warning the Ninevites. Jonah i. 3. He preferred his own honour and reputation, fearing, if the people repented, and God turned away his wrath, to be counted a false prophet. Compare Jonah ii. 10, with iv. 1, 2.

2. Preaching. Jonah iii. 4.

(1.) He wrought no miracles to prove his divine mission, yet they believed.

(2.) His preaching consisteth wholly of terror, and threatened their total ruin. "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed," was the awful denunciation. And, however unpleasant the message, yet he was not mocked, abused, nor ill-treated, as many have been, both in this land and in many others, for the sake of the gospel.

(3.) His preaching gave not the least direction what they must do to avert the danger, nor intimated that their crimes were pardonable: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." And they had no assurance of pardon offered, even upon their repentance, as appears from the king's speech. Jonah iii. 9. However, they pursued the most proper method. The text says,

3. They repented. Jonah iii. 5.

(1.) The spring of their repentance was faith. "The people of Nineveh believed God." Jonah iii. 5.

(2.) They gave evidence of repentance, by fasting, sackcloth, prayer, and forsaking evil. Jonah iii. 5, 9.

II. Contrast Jonas with Jesus Christ, as intimated in the expression, "A greater than Jonas is here." Matt. xii. 41.

1. The scriptures propose Christ to our faith.

(1.) As a person in whom created and uncreated excellences meet. Isa. ix. 6. Instance his Divinity and power, &c. Eph. i. 21, 22. Heb. i. 3.

(2.) Christ not afraid, like Jonas, of his character, reputation, or life. Heb. x. 9.

(3.) Christ wrought many and great miracles.

2. Christ's gospel is,

(1.) Good or glad tidings. John iii. 17.

(2.) It contains directions concerning pardon, salvation, &c.

(3.) Assures of mercy, &c.

(4.) Promises of grace to repentance, faith, and holiness.

III. That our non-compliance with gospel-grace will enhance our punishment.

1. Because we learn that Nineveh heard but one preaching, and they repented and reformed; but how inexcusable are we who read these woes denounced in the Bible, and hear them again and again from the mouths of faithful ministers!

2. Non-compliance is an absolute contempt of Christ and his salvation. John xv. 22. Heb. x. 28, 29.

3. No excuse can avail, neither the greatness of sins, the dread of justice, nor the hardness of the terms of divine mercy. Many plain texts of scripture sufficiently overturn every such excuse.

And lastly, conclude by pressing earnestly sinners to repent, and turn to God by prayer, &c. And hold out encouragements, &c. to returning prodigals.

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT, THE CAUSE OF JOY.

The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice, &c.—Ps. xcvi. 1, 2.

THE state of affairs in this world is so involved and perplexed, that we frequently see the most pious men in great troubles. It is often difficult for them to possess their souls in patience, when afflictions come in full tide; when divine order is apparently subverted, laws violated, and almost every thing turned upside down. Ps. lxxvii. 2, 13. This, however, has not been the case with all. Hab. iii. 17, 18.

I. God governs the world.

This will appear, if we consider,

1. The sentiments of the heathen on the subject: it is discovered by the light of nature. Hence some of them called the Divine Being, "the Soul and Spirit of the world." They were, indeed, divided in sentiment;

some of them maintaining that he did not take notice of what appeared to them trivial affairs, but only of the more important events of life : others, that he took notice of the most minute circumstances, only that he did nothing but by second causes : and others, that he did every thing immediately by himself.

2. The scriptures put this beyond doubt ; here it is written with sunbeams. From the facts here recorded, it is but just to infer what we endeavour to maintain. The deluge, &c. There is also positive evidence. Ps. xxxiv. 16, 17. Eph. i. 11. Dan. iv. 34, 35. Matt. x. 29. Ps. ciii. 19.

II. The ability of the Almighty for the business.

The most powerful being upon earth is as unable to govern the world as to create a spire of grass.

1. God is an immense being. Isa. lxvi. 1. A prince, however well qualified for the business of government, may have his affairs involved in discord and confusion, for want of his presence ; but this cannot be the case with the Almighty. Ps. cxxxix. 7, 10. Acts xvii. 28.

2. All-powerful. Job xxvi. 7. Ps. civ. He asks no leave, he needs no help, he cannot know any impediment.

3. Infinitely wise. Ps. cxxxix. 1, 6. Job ix. 4. 1 Tim. i. 17. Prov. xix. 21 ; xxi. 30. 1 Cor. i. 25.

4. He is patient. Those who have great power and little patience are not fit for the business of government. 2 Pet. iii. 9. Eccl. viii. 11.

III. The extent of his government.

1. His government extends to all creatures, both animate and inanimate. 1 Chron. xxix. 12. 1 Pet. iii. 22. Ps. ciii. 20 ; civ. 19. Job ix. 7. Jer. xxxii. 17. Num. xxi. 22. Ps. civ. 25, 29.

2. To the various actions of his creatures, whether those actions be good or bad. Dan. iii. 25, 26. 1 Kings xvii. 6. Ps. lxxvi. 10.

IV. The manner.

1. Mysteriously. Clouds, &c. Nahum i. 3. Ps. lxxvii. 19.

2. Although he governs the world mysteriously, he doth it righteously. Righteousness, &c. Rev. xv. 3. Rom. ii. 2. Dan. ix. 14. Ps. cxix. 142, 160 ; xxv. 10.

Inferences :

1. Learn hence to admire the God of Providence. How great must be his power, how immense his being, how extensive his understanding !

2. How terrible must be his wrath, and of what great importance must his favour be ; how much, therefore, are we concerned to secure his favour, to hearken to his calls, to embrace his promises, to make him our friend !

3. To trust and acquiesce in his providence, without murmuring and repining. To repine is to disgrace our profession.

4. Learn to pay more attention to his providence, to acknowledge his goodness, and to bless him for all the enjoyments of life. An attentive regard to his providence would increase our thankfulness. Let us love, obey, and honour that God, " whose tender mercies are over all his works !" Ps. cxlv. 9.

JESUS CHRIST FOR EVER THE SAME.

Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.—Heb. xiii. 8.

IN the present state, the affairs, both of individuals and of nations, are liable to continual fluctuations. Revelation affords consolation to us, by directing us to a God, as reconciled to us through the Son of his love, and who changeth not. In times of national calamity. Isa. viii. 12—14. Are we agitated by a sense of personal danger? Isa. li. 12, 13. How changing and fluctuating the things of this world! yet the Creator, the Redeemer, the Saviour of the world, is still the same: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday," &c.

I. He is the same in the dignity of his person.

The terms "yesterday, to-day, and for ever," are expressive of a true and proper eternity. In this view they are applied to Jehovah. Ex. iii. 14. This august title is repeatedly given to Jesus Christ. Ps. cii. 27. Heb. i. 11. Mic. v. 2. Prov. viii. 23. Rev. i. 8. John viii. 58. When we confess him as our Lord, we glorify the Father. Phil. ii. 10, 11. James i. 17. "The same yesterday," &c.

II. In the extent of his power.

We are informed that Jesus Christ is the Creator of the universe, Heb. i. 10, and from the first moment of its existence he hath upheld it. In the days of his flesh he displayed the same omnipotence, cleansed the lepers, opened the eyes of the blind, raised the dead, stilled the winds, calmed the waves. The impression of divinity was stamped on all his actions: What he was yesterday, he is to-day, &c. Is there any disease of the soul or body, that he cannot heal? are any lusts so raging that he cannot calm, or inveterate that he cannot root out? HE, who said, "Let there be light," &c. Gen. i. 3, can transform our souls anew. "Is there any thing too hard for him, who has all power in heaven?" &c. Matt. xxviii. 18. He is still the same, and the excellency of his power is unsearchable.

III. In the virtue of his sacrifice.

Though he was not manifested in human flesh, till four thousand years had elapsed, yet his sacrifice availed for thousands, during the whole of that period. He was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," which all the sacrifices under the law typified. Heb. ix. 19—26. 1 John i. 7. Heb. vii. 27. Isa. xlv. 22.

IV. In the tenderness of his compassion.

It was he who led the children of Israel through the wilderness. Compare Ps. lxxviii. 40, 41. 1 Cor. x. 6. His tender compassion toward them is repeatedly acknowledged. Ps. lxxviii. 38. Isa. lxiii. 9. Deut. xxxii. 9—12. Jesus Christ is still the same. Isa. xl. 11; xliii. 3. Luke xix. 41, 42. Heb. iv. 15. Ps. cxlv. 8.

V. In his fidelity to his promises.

He led his people of old through the wilderness. He had promised to cast out all their enemies, and to give them "a land overflowing with milk and honey;" and behold, Joshua, at the close of a long life, and after an experience of many years, could make this appeal. Josh. xxiii. 14. The same fidelity did Jesus manifest while on earth: and he is in-

variably the same. He hath given exceeding great and precious promises to his church, not one jot or tittle of which has ever failed. Ps. lxxxvi. 11. 2 Cor. iv. 17. Only commit your souls to him in well-doing, and he will "keep you by his almighty power through faith unto salvation; for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

CHRIST'S LOVE TO HIS PEOPLE,

THE BEST INCENTIVE TO A SIMILAR AFFECTION.

As my Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love.
John xv. 9.

REASON could never suggest motives sufficient to counteract the passions. The law of God itself, with all its sanctions, could not change the heart; the gospel only can make sin odious, and holiness delightful. It effects this by revealing to us the love of Christ. 2 Cor. v. 14.

I. The nature and extent of Christ's love to us.

The comparison in the text denotes not equality, but resemblance. Matt. v. 48. The love of Christ to us, like that of his Father to him, is,

1. Without beginning.

(1.) There never was a period when the Father first began to love his Son: he loved him before his entrance on his ministry; Matt. iii. 17; before his existence in the world; John i. 18; before Isaiah's time; Isa. xlii. 1; from all eternity. John xvii. 24.

(2.) There never was a period when Christ first began to love us. His love is first manifested when we believe in him; but our faith in him is the effect, not the cause, of his love to us. This is affirmed by the prophets; Jer. xxxi. 3. Ezek. xvi. 6; and by Christ himself, John xv. 16.

2. Without measure.

(1.) The Father's love to Christ was unbounded. He is one with Christ in nature, and therefore in affections; John x. 30; he hath shown the greatness of his love to him, in the gifts bestowed upon him, John iii. 35. Col. i. 19: and in his constant co-operation with him. John v. 19, 20.

(2.) Christ's love to us is also unbounded. It produced most astonishing acts of kindness towards us. Eph. v. 25. Rev. i. 5, 6. Human affections fall short of it. Isa. xlix. 15, 16. It passeth all knowledge, whether of men or angels.

3. Without variation.

(1.) The Father's love to Christ was unchangeable. His love seems to have been withdrawn for a season; Matt. xxvii. 46; he seemed not to answer his prayers; Luke xxii. 42, 44; but he heard him always, John xi. 44, and loved him always. The apparent suspensions of his love were the necessary means of accomplishing the purposes of his love, even towards Christ himself. Heb. ii. 10.

(2.) Christ's love to us also is unchangeable. There are seasons when he seems to withdraw his love; but his chastisements are tokens

of his love. Heb. xii. 6. He hates sin, indeed, and will correct his children for it, till they put it away. Ps. lxxxix. 31—33. Zeph. iii. 17.

4. Without end.

(1.) The Father's love to Christ shall endure for ever. He hath given him a pledge of this in his exaltation to heaven.

(2.) Christ's love to us shall also be everlasting. He knows no change of mind with respect to what he hath bestowed. Rom. xi. 29. John xiii.

1. This truth is a just ground of joy and confidence. Rom. viii. 35, 38, 39. What returns can we ever make to Christ for such amazing love?

II. The duty resulting from it.

This part of the text requires application rather than discussion. It sets before us, not merely our privilege, (which is to continue in a sense of Christ's love to us,) but our duty,

1. To love Christ. This would have been our duty, though he had not so loved us; but the obligation to it is greatly increased by his love. Let him, then, be exceeding precious to us; let us despise every thing in comparison of him. Phil. iii. 8.

2. To continue in love to him. We are too apt to decline in our love; Matt. xxiv. 12; but declensions, however secret, are very offensive. Rev. ii. 4. They will, if continued in, disqualify us for heaven; Luke ix. 62; they will reduce us to a worse situation than ever. 2 Pet. ii. 22. Let us, therefore, cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart. Acts xi. 23.

3. To abound in all acts and offices of love to him. In secret, let us contemplate, admire, and adore his excellences; in public, let us confess, honour, and obey him. Matt. x. 32. John xiv. 21.

It commends to us that duty, as resulting from the declaration that precedes it.

The love of Christ towards us is the strongest of all motives to the love of him.

Was Christ's love to us so unmerited, unbounded, invariable, and lasting; and shall ours to him be weak and transient?

Let it operate, then, on all our hearts; let us not rest satisfied with what we have attained. Phil. iii. 12, 13. Let us meditate on his love, as the means of increasing ours. Eph. iii. 18, 19.

MEN'S NEGLECT OF GOD.

But none saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?
Job xxxv. 10.

WE have an infinitely greater interest in God, than we can have in all the creation; yet are we less conversant with him, than we are with those objects which daily present themselves to us. Happy were it if devotion were more in fashion, and other things less; fortunate for the present age, if it could be said, that Elihu's complaint is not applicable to it: "None saith, Where is God my Maker?" &c.

Consider,

I. What is meant by inquiring after God our Maker.

1. When we investigate the important question, Is there a Deity? what notions are we to form of his nature, perfections, and providence?
2. When we apply to him in the exercise of religious duty, particularly prayer. Job viii. 5. Isa. lv. 6.
3. When we are solicitous to discover his will concerning our duty and privilege, as moral and reasonable beings. Rom. xii. 2. 1 Thess. iv. 3.
4. When we earnestly pant after his approbation, and give ourselves no rest till we obtain it, through repentance for sin, and faith in the atonement of the Son of God. Rom. iii. 25, 26.
5. When we thirst after that better country, where God is enjoyed, and where our inquiries after him shall meet with ample success. There we shall have the justest and the brightest ideas of him, the most glorious resemblance of his holy and benevolent nature. 1 John iii. 2.

II. Why is it that so few are making this inquiry?

1. Because mankind are so much engaged about visible things: these strike the senses more than things of a spiritual and invisible nature; and seem to be the only things which command their attention.
2. Dissipation. They have no taste but for play and amusement, one scene of diversion after another; the hours which should be spent in intercourse with heaven, are prostituted to folly, vanity, and idleness.
3. They make a God of this world, by placing their affections supremely upon it; James iv. 4; its gold and silver, honour, fame, power, dominion, popular applause.
4. They are sensual, making a God of pleasure, sensuality, lascivious gratifications. How can a soul, thus fettered to earth, elevate itself to inquire after God its Maker? no more than a bird can ascend without wings.

5. Some live so criminally, that God is the object of their dread: they wish there was no God; are glad to hear religion opposed; would be happy to hear its truths confuted, if they could; they would obliterate the doctrine of providence, and the soul's immortality.

III. Consider the amiable account here given of God: "he giveth songs in the night;" or matter of songs, &c.

1. By exhibiting those bright orbs which fill the expanse of heaven. Ps. viii. 3, 4.

2. Night may be taken figuratively. Day is put for prosperity, success, joy, and comfort. Night for adversity, calamity, grief, and vexation. God cheereth the mourner's heart, and solaceth his people in the night of adversity, grants support, unexpected relief. Ps. lxxvi. 19.

3. He giveth songs in the night of death, of praise and thanksgiving, of victory. 1 Cor. xv. 55; iv. 7.

Improvement:

1. Let us rejoice in him, who lifteth up the hands that hang down, and giveth songs of praise in adversity.

2. Let us adore the wisdom of Providence, in whose dispensations day and night, good and evil, are so seasonably blended, enjoy the good thankfully, suffer the evil with resignation.

3. Let us fortify ourselves under every calamity by looking forward to that blessed period, when the good man's night shall be changed into everlasting day.

GOD'S LOVE TO MAN IN THE GIFT OF HIS SON.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?—Rom. viii. 32.

To think worthily of God we must conceive of him as a Being of universal benevolence : he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to accomplish our deliverance from sin and misery. What may we not expect after such an instance of love? So the apostle argues ; and is not his argument like the melody of heaven? Does it not awaken every feeling of hope, love, and devotion? Does it not touch every tender spring of the heart? “He that spared not,” &c.

I. Illustrate the meaning of the expression, “God spared not his own Son.”

1. These words express the awful procedure of God towards a person related to him in the most endearing manner. Christ is the Son of God, his own Son, his only Son. John i. 14. Heb. i. 3.

2. Not that the Father withdrew his love from him ; for as Christ was always perfectly amiable, so the Father's love to him is perfectly steady.

3. Nor that he behaved to him, as some earthly parents do towards their children, in a cruel, unjust, and tyrannical manner.

4. But, that the Father did not withhold his Son, when the circumstances of man required such a Mediator.

5. That he abated nothing of the punishment which Christ, as our Mediator, voluntarily undertook to bear; Isa. liii. 5 ; and so made an atonement for the sins of the whole world. 1 John ii. 2.

II. In what sense God delivered up his Son for us all.

1. It may apply to his incarnation : he was then delivered to an humble condition. “The Word was made flesh.” John i. 14.

2. Delivered to mean circumstances in our nature, poverty, and want. Matt. viii. 20. Persecution. Isa. liii. 3.

3. To unspeakable agony of mind. Matt. xxvi. 38.

4. Into the hands of malicious men, who bound, scourged, buffeted, crowned him with thorns, and spit upon him.

5. To death, the death of the cross : shameful, painful. All this came to pass by the appointment of God, in consequence of his friendly intentions to man.

6. For us all ; in our stead ; for our benefit ; that we might be justified, sanctified, glorified. 1 Pet. iii. 18. Heb. ii. 10.

II. The inference drawn from the Divine conduct as expressed in the text. If God gave up his Son for us all, we may depend upon it, that he will give us all things together with him.

1. All things temporal, as God sees necessary, and as will be most conducive to our present and eternal happiness.

2. All spiritual blessings, illumination, pardon, justification, adoption, sanctification, peace, love, joy, hope, eternal glory ; and the certainty of receiving these things arises, Eph. i. 3.

3. From the immutability of God's goodness. The apostle's meaning.

is, that so great an expression of love, as God's delivering his Son, infers every other expression.

4. From God's giving his Son power to give all things. Matt. xxviii. 18.

5. From the promise of God. Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

Improvement :

1. Let the benevolence of the Father, in delivering up his Son for us, excite us to acts of charity to the poor and needy.

2. Let it excite the warmest emotions of love and gratitude to God for his boundless love.

3. Let that love and gratitude appear in a jealous devotedness to his service and glory.

4. Let it encourage our entire dependence on God in Christ, for present salvation and eternal glory.

CHRIST'S LOVE TO MAN IN DYING FOR HIM.

The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead.—2 Cor. v. 14.

IN the former verse the apostle represents himself and his brethren discharging their duty with so much zeal and order, as might be construed madness by superficial and inconsiderate minds. In the text he accounts for this conduct, and tells us what principle it was that thus actuated them. "The love of Christ," &c. This kindles an internal fire in our minds; this offers a moral violence to our wills and affections, and makes a kind of necessity the agent in performing his pleasure.

I. Describe the love of Christ in dying for men. Four things exhibit this love in the most advantageous light, and recommend it by whatever can endear or persuade.

1. The dignity of the person who loved us, the Son of God, who is God over all. John i. 1. Rom. ix. 5.

2. The nature of his sufferings and death. He was poor, persecuted, rejected, scourged, crowned with thorns and crucified. Phil. ii. 7, 8.

3. The noble and blessed end for which he died; to leave us a pattern of patience and resignation, of integrity and benevolence; to deter men for ever from sin; to induce to holiness; to raise our souls to God, by the charms of such love; to prevent our dying for ever; to shut the gates of hell; open heaven; replace man in paradise, that he might be the author of salvation to all that obey him. Heb. v. 9.

4. The character of those for whom he died. The impure, the guilty, the ungodly, enemies to God. Rom. v. 8, 10. The unjust. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

II. In what sense all were dead, when Christ died for all.

1. All mankind were subject to natural death through the original transgression. Rom. v. 10.

2. Were morally dead; destitute of every good and gracious principle; dead in sin. Eph. ii. 1.

3. Were liable to the second death. Rev. xxi. 8. Condemned to suffer it. John iii. 18.

III. Consider the returns to which this great love obliges men.

1. To express the most grateful sense of his loving kindness : by loving him, 1 John iv. 19, imitating him in sincerity, beneficence, justice, devotion, mildness, peaceableness, mercifulness. 1 Pet. ii. 21.

2. To obey his government over us, by consulting his will as revealed in the scriptures, and cheerfully complying with his commands. John xiv. 15.

3. To prepare for his second appearing ; to be found of him in peace, without spot. Eph. v. 27 ; with confidence and joy. 1 John ii. 28.

CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.—Matt. i. 23.

WE read in the ancient poets, of the gods descending to this earth, and occasionally visiting the sons of men : what they tell us on this subject is mere fable ; it is the poets own invention, contrived to animate his story. But the gospel delivers to us a matter of fact ; it celebrates the actual descent of God to our world, to dwell among men ; to refine their grovelling nature ; to lead them beyond the grave to scenes of immortality. The coming of Jesus Christ is a visit from heaven, a visit from the Prince of heaven : it is more, it is God himself entering into the strictest union with human nature. This is the meaning of the great name by which our Lord is dignified in my text.

I. Consider in what sense Christ is Immanuel, and in what respects he answers that name.

1. He is literally so : God with us ; he is God united to man. God veiling the splendour of his Divinity under a human form. John i. 14. The Messiah is properly the Schechina, God dwelling in man. And so intimate is this union, that the properties of the one nature are applied and transferred to the other. The properties of the Word are ascribed to human nature ; and reciprocally the properties of human nature to the Divine person, called the Word. See John iii. 13. Christ was in heaven at the time he preached on the earth ; but this was true of him only as God. Acts xx. 28. Blood was applicable to Christ only as man, and yet the apostle applies it to God ; the foundation of which language can only be this, that one person is both God and man. This is mysterious, 1 Tim. iii. 16, yet no absurdity in it. God, the Creator of all, who pervades all, may animate and connect himself with any particular nature, and to what degree he thinks proper. The gospel declares this to be matter of fact.

2. Because of the God-like virtues he displayed : he lived like God ; did nothing but good ; was perfectly innocent, humble, meek ; benevolent to friends and foes. He gave health to the sick, &c. in the height

of his agony pleaded the cause of his murderers; and the dignity of his conduct forced the centurian to cry, "Truly this," &c. Matt. xxvii. 54.

3. Because of his office of Mediator, he is the peace-maker between God and fallen man: it is through him that God is reconciled; God and man united; through him the blessings of salvation flow to man; the duties of religion, performed, ascend acceptably to God. In this sense he is "God with us."

II. For what purpose did the Son of God unite with human nature?

1. To enlighten mankind with the most important discoveries. Matt. iv. 16. Luke i. 78, 79. To teach us the unity of God; the terms of our acceptance with God; to unfold the invisible world; to lay open the state of the dead; to give the highest idea of the happiness of good men, and the misery of the bad; to assure us of a general resurrection and final judgment; the everlasting consequences of both, to give us rules of conduct in the greatest simplicity, clothed with language so plain as to suit the meanest capacity; and so sublime as to charm the most cultivated mind.

2. To exhibit to man a pattern of perfect righteousness and virtue. What ingredient is there of genuine piety, which we find not exemplified in the conduct of Jesus? How gentle, benign, patient, was his answer to his disciples! Luke ix. 54—56. How temperate, yet not austere! How magnanimous! adhering to truth in the face of danger and death. How benevolent! His whole life was one continued flow of ardent affection, of generous deeds. How humble! How devout! He continually breathed adoration, thanks, resignation, and obedience to the Great Original, whence he came, and whither he went.

3. To expiate human guilt, and procure the pardon of sin by the sacrifice of his death. John i. 29. Gal. iii. 13. Heb. ix. 22.

4. To remove all variance between God and man, that God might dwell among them. 2 Cor. vi. 16, 17.

5. To purify our nature, and restore us to the Divine image. Tit. ii. 14.

6. To bring us into the happiest union with God; that he might bring us to heaven, which is, properly speaking, the land of Immanuel; a land where God is with us, and we are with God. Rev. xxi. 3; xxii. 4, 6.

Improvement:

1. If Christ is Immanuel, he has a clear title to our religious homage. John v. 23.

2. It should excite our highest admiration of the Divine goodness and condescension.

3. Let us feel a divine sensibility of mind; display a proper sublimity of conduct, by not degrading that nature which God hath so highly honoured by assuming it into an immediate society with himself. Let us cast out this earth from our hearts; let us no longer prostitute our love to inferior things, but live as those whose prospects extend beyond the present perishing world; who hope, by the power of Immanuel, to be one day conquerors over death and the grave. 1 Cor. xv. 54—58.

To conclude. Let us be sensible to the life of God in our nature; daily ascend to him in such efforts as our nature is capable of; by the aid of his Spirit let us go from strength to strength till we appear before him in Zion, and take our seat with Immanuel in the regions of the blessed. Amen!

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM.

Ye are come to Mount Zion.—Heb. xii. 22, 23.

NOTHING tends more to elevate the soul than to contemplate the glorious relations that ennoble us by embracing the gospel. There is a general bond that unites all mankind: we are all by nature connected and allied to each other: we are the same flesh and blood, animated with the same immortal and reasonable souls. In every civil society there is also a positive relation uniting its several members, by virtue of which they are esteemed to form one political body; but the religion of Christ introduces a new and more noble kind of alliance; it opens a communication between heaven and earth; it incorporates mortal men with the blessed angels and immortal spirits above. As men we are allied to each other; as Christians we are raised out of ourselves, and united to beings of a higher order, and a more exalted perfection; in a word, the gospel translates us who dwell in houses of clay to the "city which hath foundations." "Ye are come to Mount Zion."

These words present the following considerations:

I. The state of heaven as a glorious city. "Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."

By Mount Zion, is not meant the mountain literally so called; but that glorious region prefigured by it; for it is farther styled "the heavenly Jerusalem." As we cannot form an adequate conception of heaven, it is shadowed forth under various comparisons; it is likened to a pearl of great price, an incorruptible kingdom, a crown of glory that fadeth not away. Every image that is great and agreeable, that can dazzle the eye, or fire the imagination, is borrowed to give some idea of that which surpasseth understanding. It is here compared to a rich and magnificent city, the city of the living God; also Heb. xi. 10. This is that city,

1. Where the most glorious display of divine wisdom appears, every thing conducted with exquisite policy.

2. Where omnipotent goodness operates at large, and deals her favours with the richest profusion. Ps. xvi. 11.

3. Where the King of Glory himself dwells, and every thing declares his more immediate presence. Rev. vii. 15.

4. Where the laws, manners, and employments of the inhabitants most resemble and are most worthy of God.

5. In fine, this is that city which is the first production of the grand Architect of nature, and whither we are at last conveyed, but not till duly prepared for it. Rev. xxi. 27; xxii. 14. See a fine description of this city, Rev. xxi. 10—22. And of this city, all real Christians are represented as members, even while they are in this world; and this is the

II. Thing to be observed in these words; our accession or relation to it. There is a certain figure made use of by our Saviour and his apostles, a figure that anticipates hereafter; that makes futurity present, and realizes the distant glories of immortality. Matt. v. 3; Eph. ii. 6. And the text says, "ye are come;"—"already come," &c. The Christian religion suggests particular grounds for this sublime representation, such as no other system or institution can exhibit. For example, we have,

1. The express promise of God to put every persevering Christian into the possession of Mount Zion above. Rev. xxii. 14; ii. 7, 10.

2. It is farther ascertained from the mediation of Christ, the grand end of which see, Heb. ii. 10.

3. The supreme power of the Redeemer; Matt. xxviii. 18; which is equal to remove every difficulty, subdue every enemy, supply every necessity, and exalt to the highest dignity. It is an infallible event, that they who regulate themselves by the laws of that higher country, shall at last be received into it: for as in the natural world there is, by the appointment of God, a natural connexion between seed-time and harvest; so in the moral world, they who, by piety and virtue, sow for heaven, shall finally reap it. Gal. vi. 7, 8. It is, therefore, with great propriety, that real Christians are represented, by a noble anticipation, as already come to Mount Zion. We may now consider,

III. Our relation to the Head and to the members of this city. And we shall arrange them in such order as their several natures respectively entitle them to.

1. Ye are come to God, the Judge of all, angels and men; the knowledge of God, his nature, unity, perfections, providence. Eph. v. 8. The worship and service of God. 1 Thess. i. 9. To his favour. Rom. v. 1. His family and household. Gal. iv. 6, 7. His presence; an event so certain that the apostle at once transports the Christian beyond the grave, to that Being who is the soul's portion, her centre and final happiness.

2. To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant: in and through whom both parts of the covenant are reciprocally conveyed and transmitted. Blessings from God to man, through Christ; and duties from man to God, acceptable through Christ. Come to the Mediator, so as to be united to him; participate a new nature through him, 2 Cor. v. 17; rely on his sacrifice, obey his commandments, and, according to the aforementioned figure, to be taken by him at last to the city of God. Rev. iii. 21.

3. To an innumerable company of angels. Good men in this world have, indisputably, various connexions with those superior beings; they are fellow-subjects and servants. Rev. xxii. 9. Protected by them. Ps. xxxiv. 7. Minister to them. Heb. i. 14. Conduct them to heaven. Luke xvi. 22. As public heralds, proclaim their Lord's approach. Matt. xxiv. 31. The apostle here anticipates our incorporation with those happy spirits in glory. Rev. vii. 9—12.

4. To the spirits of just men made perfect. We are one community, of the same spirit and disposition, loving the same God, enjoying the same felicity, differing only in degree. They are got home, we are going; they have got the prize, we are wrestling for it. They are perfected in knowledge, comparatively; their piety refined into the brightest fire; their devotion feels that ardour which is the character of heaven; their social temper is matured. To these happy souls the Christian is united, and death will soon remove him to their blessed society.

2. To the general assembly and church of the first-born. Rom. viii. 29. Col. i. 15—18. It may respect themselves; they are the chiefs, the excellent ones, the first-born. Written in heaven, alluding to the

customs of ancient states, who enrolled their freemen; Christians enrolled in heaven, Luke x. 20, to signify that they have a right to all the high privileges of the city of God: and, when all collected, compose the general assembly, &c. Matt. xxiv. 31. Rev. vii. 9. Of this amazing corporation every Christian becomes a member at the moment of his conversion to God.

Improvement:

1. Hence see the peculiar excellency of that religion which animates her proselytes with so glorious a hope.

2. Let our temper and conduct declare our kindred to those serene and happy intelligences.

3. Let the views of these glorious and animating prospects raise our souls to God in grateful adoration of his goodness and love. Ps. xxxi. 21; lxxii. 18, 19.

CHRIST, THE MESSENGER OF HIS OWN GOSPEL.

But last of all, he sent unto them his Son, saying, They will reverence my Son.—Matt. xxi. 37.

THE method of instructing by parables was much in vogue among all the nations of the East, especially the Jewish. In conformity to this custom, and to convey the most important lessons under lively and sensible images, images suited at once to inform and to move his audience, are reasons why our blessed Lord makes such frequent use of parables.

These words are part of a very interesting parable delivered by him to the Jews; and it finishes with an effecting description of God sending his Son to them, and their ungrateful and cruel treatment of him. Verses 38, 39.

The words of the text furnish us with the following reflections:

I. The dignity of the person whom God employed to preach the gospel, his Son.

1. A person superior to Moses, the prophets, and infinitely superior to every other messenger of God.

2. The sublimest titles are bestowed on this person both in the Old and New Testament. He is styled God's beloved Son; his only Son; the only begotten of the Father; God over all, blessed for ever; Immanuel; Jehovah our Righteousness; Alpha and Omega; the perfect image or character of the invisible God; full of grace and truth; the True, the Righteous, the Holy: has the keys of hell and death. Rev. i. 18.

II. That this is the final interposition of God in our favour, "last of all." It is the last effort of heaven, the ultimate exertion of Divine mercy toward the restoration of man.

1. As he is infinitely superior to all that were before him, so it may well be presumed that none will come after him; and that the message he brings, seals and finishes God's revelation to the children of men.

Besides,

2. This is the constant language of scripture. Heb. ii. 3, 14. To the same purpose said our Saviour to the Jews. John viii. 24. And,

3. This is the reason why the predictions relating to the Messiah, refer his coming to the last days. Isa. ii. 2. These expressions "last day," and "the end of the world," &c. are applied to the age of the gospel, to show that it is the last dispensation God will vouchsafe to mankind. It is the final message of the Almighty.

III. Our duty, in relation to this sacred Messenger of heaven; to reverence him.

1. By attending to the proofs of his divine mission. This he requires, John v. 31, 38.

2. By receiving him in that capacity with gratitude, love, hope, joy; we should raise our hosannahs, Matt. xxi. 9, and ascribe glory to God. Luke ii. 14.

3. By embracing the holy errand on which he was sent, and complying with the practical purposes of his mission: "God raised up his Son to bless us." How? "In turning us from our iniquities," and teaching us "to deny ungodliness," &c. Tit. ii. 12.

4. By forming ourselves according to that sacred model he exhibited to mankind. We must breathe his Spirit, and imitate his graces. John xiii. 15. 1 Pet. ii. 21.

5. By receiving pardon and sanctification through that awful method which God has appointed, the blood of his Son. Col. i. 14. John i. 7.

6. By daily acts of worship and adoration; honouring the Son as we honour the Father. John v. 23. Rom. xiv. 11.

Improvement:

1. Let us dread the consequences of receiving so much grace and favour from God in vain, by neglecting our day of visitation.

2. If we reverence and respect Jesus Christ, who is God's own Son, so nearly allied to him, we may assuredly expect the favour of the Almighty.

CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS, &C. FINISHED.

He said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.
John xix. 30.

WHETHER it be that dying men are most serious, and if ever they speak their real sentiments, it must be at that period; or whether it be, that one stepping into the invisible world, is almost considered as a messenger from it, fit to instruct the living how to behave in their future conduct; or, whatever else may be the reason, one thing is certain, that the words of a dying man are listened to with peculiar attention: and if we lend so serious an ear to the last speech of expiring mortals, what profound attention must be due to the exit of the Son of God, and to the words he pronounced at leaving this world! They are few in number, but full of meaning: he said, "it is finished." The words, "he gave up the ghost," possibly, have a much higher meaning than when applied to any other person: they express a voluntary surrender of himself for the sins of men. John x. 18. As Jesus came into the world to accomplish the redemption of mankind by his death, so he seems, in the text, to express

a magnanimous complacency, in his having accomplished that grand design: "He said," with a secret joy becoming his benevolent soul, "it is finished:" my design of coming, my mediatorial work, as far as it relates to this world, to this side of heaven.

I. Inquire into the sense of these words, "it is finished."

1. They may refer to those types under the law, by which his death was prefigured. The legal constitution of things was wholly typical of the more perfect dispensation to be established under the Messiah. Heb. x. 1. In his death they were all fulfilled.

2. To the ancient prophecies, which relate to him and his death. Gen. iii. 15. Isa. 53. Dan. ix. 26. Zech. xiii. 7. When he died, they were all accomplished.

3. To the Jewish economy; for having fulfilled the types and prophecies of the law, he put a period to that dispensation; Col. ii. 14; but not to the moral law, which is eternal in its obligations to obedience, Matt. v. 17—19, and receives a new sanction from the death of Christ.

4. To the atonement for sin: by his death he made a perfect and final expiation of it. He finished transgression. Dan. ix. 24. Heb. x. 14.

5. To the purchase of our redemption, which was finished by his death: he not only atoned for our sin, but also purchased immortality for us. Heb. v. 8, 9; ix. 12. His work, as Mediator, as it respects this world, was perfected through suffering. Heb. ii. 10.

6. To the perfect pattern of sanctity and goodness he exhibited for the imitation of men. 1 Pet. ii. 21.

II. The consequences of all this in relation to Christ.

1. If Jesus has fulfilled both the types and the prophecies of the law, it follows, by immediate consequence, that he is the Messiah.

2. If Jesus submitted even to death itself, in order to finish our redemption, we infer that he is not less willing than able to save us. John v. 40.

3. Hence see the virtue of the death of Christ, that by one offering of himself, he hath finished transgression, &c. which must be ascribed to the dignity of his person. Acts xx. 28. What is it that the blood of God may not atone for!

4. If Jesus finished, and exhausted the character of Mediator, it follows that all others are of mere human invention.

5. That if his sufferings were finished when he died, the idea of his going into the place of the damned, to suffer there, has no foundation in truth.

6. We see the reason why the death of Christ is celebrated in heaven, and kindling the hallelujahs of the blessed above. Rev. i. 5, 6; v. 11, 12.

The practical consequences of all this, in relation to us.

1. If Jesus has shown himself to be the Messiah, by fulfilling the types and prophecies, let us treat him as the Sent of God, and Saviour of the world.

2. If he has atoned for sin, &c. let us totally and finally break all connexion with it. Isa. lv. 7.

3. If he condescended to die for our salvation, let us be grateful, affectionate, and strive in all things to please him. Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

4. If he has finished the purchase of redemption on his part, let us

be careful to fulfil the conditions on our part ; repentance, faith, love, and all holy obedience. John xiii. 17.

In fine, if Jesus has left us an example, let us endeavour more and more to conform ourselves to it. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

THE UPRIGHT TRIUMPHANT.

The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning.—Ps. xlix. 14.

WITH what contempt do the generality of mankind look upon what is called uprightness ! but there is a day coming that will undeceive them : death will open their eyes, and the dawn of another life will manifest the worth of what they so much undervalued. Though the wicked now trample on the friends of truth, they shall in their turn, have their day of triumph ; and this is beautifully expressed in the words of the text, “The upright,” &c.

I. The nature of uprightness.

1. The upright man regards truth in all he says and does ; delivers it freely, and keeps to it strictly.

2. He is sincere in all his professions of piety. He is not religious because religion is fashionable or popular ; but because it is the genuine complexion of his soul.

3. He is always disposed to deal honestly with mankind ; sincere in his attachments and friendships.

4. He is always disposed to do what is right, and he does it from a principle of conscience. The essence of integrity lies here.

5. Instead of fixing his eyes on worldly gain, he seeks to better his own soul, and improve his disposition.

6. He ultimately intends the approbation of God, and in all his designs he seeks to please him.

II. In what sense it may be said to be oppressed, in the present state of things.

1. Many a virtuous soul has groaned beneath the burden of poverty. James ii. 6.

2. And have been held in contempt for being so ; as if it were a virtue to be rich, and a vice to be poor.

3. They have been ridiculed for their piety and virtue ; and laughed at for the respect they have shown to the Divine Being. Matt. v. 10.

4. Or, if they do not go to such an enormous length, they pride themselves in depreciating the best men and their best actions. Ps. lxxiii. 3—14.

III. The certainty of righteousness prevailing in the morning of a better day.

How agreeable is the image here used to represent the arrival of upright men on the shores of the blessed, and to describe their first felicity and joy ! How sweetly is it compared to the morning !

1. Then shall the righteous be superior to the evils of this life ; pain, poverty, &c.

2. No censure shall arise to blast the fame of the innocent, or lessen the reputation of the well-deserving man.

3. The most endearing regard shall meet their eye, wherever they turn it.

4. All the orders of the blessed shall conspire, with unfeigned lips, to applaud their constancy in the truth.

5. Thus shall it fare with the righteous; but let the wicked prepare to meet a different fate. They shall be tormented by their own consciences; corrupt passions without objects to gratify them; and the displeasure of that Being whose existence they hardly believed.

Improvement:

1. Let the enemies of truth and religion remember, that there enjoyment will not be lasting; their triumph will soon be ended. Job xx. 5.

2. Let the upright be patient in adversity, knowing that the day of their triumph approaches, when they shall obtain an immortal victory over the enemies of their peace.

THE DYING CHRISTIAN'S STRENGTH.

For thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.—Ps. xxxi. 4, 5.

THESE are the words of holy David, one born from heaven; and hoping, if the almost desperate dangers he was now in should bring him down to death, as they threatened to do, he should be taken up thither by his merciful God.

From these words we may observe,

I. That dying is considered by the good man as a work of considerable difficulty.

1. As it is a work untried: and none are allowed to return to tell what it is.

2. As it is a final farewell to the present world; to accommodations, comforts, employments, delights, relations. Isa. xxxviii. 11, 12.

3. As it is to put off a part of ourselves, our bodies, for which we feel a great love and tenderness; which it reduced to dust. Eccl. xii. 7.

4. As it puts an end to our state of probation, which makes dying work of the greatest importance. We are sent into this world to prepare for another. Gal. vi. 7, 8.

5. As it removes the soul into a new state and world. We know what this world is, but we know very little of the other. 1 John iii. 2.

6. As it introduces the soul into the presence of God as a judge, who will determine its eternal state. Heb. ix. 27.

II. The children of God, when dying, are chiefly concerned about their souls: "O Lord, into thy hands I commit my spirit;" let that be safe, and all is well.

1. Holy souls must leave the body by dying, as well as others. Zech. i. 5.

2. They discover their great care to their souls, by looking off from the creature to God, and seeking their happiness in him. Ps. lxii. 5.

III. The real Christian has abundant encouragement, when dying, to commit his soul into the hands of God, in a lively hope that he shall be happy with him for ever.

This committing of the soul to God, implies,

1. That the rest and happiness of the soul is only to be found in God.

Ps. lxxiii. 25.

2. A reviving persuasion that God is become the God of peace to the Christian; as having received satisfaction for him through Jesus Christ. Rom. v. 1. Eph. ii. 14, 15.

3. A making use of Christ as the way to the Father. John xiv. 6.

The saints commit their souls into the hands of God by Jesus Christ,

(1.) That they might be safe. 2 Tim. i. 12.

(2.) Admitted to dwell with him. Phil. i. 23.

(3.) That their bodies may at length be raised and reunited. Rom. viii. 11.

(4.) And this they do in obedience to his command: God requires the soul. Luke xii. 20.

(5.) And this is the last crowning act of obedience; we live, we die, to the Lord. Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

Improvement:

1. What a great difference there is between the souls and bodies of men! The soul survives the body.

2. What a blessed change has the grace of God made in the judgments and affections of his people! Their souls are their principal care.

3. It is the people of God only, who have so much encouragement to commit their souls into his hands, when dying. Prov. xiv. 32.

4. How great are our obligations to Christ, for purchasing so great a privilege for us!

5. Let us not be slothful, &c. Heb. vi. 12.

MAN'S ORIGINAL APOSTACY.

And the Lord called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?
Gen. iii. 9.

WE have the voice of man's Creator and Judge, making inquiries after his creature, now lost, and, by his early disobedience, fallen from God. The Almighty coming into paradise, and finding his creatures fled, avoiding his presence, hiding themselves among the trees; he calls to one of them in the words of the text, "Adam, where art thou?"

Consider,

I. The primitive apostacy: how it came to pass.

1. Man, though created perfectly holy, was mutable. He had power sufficient to preserve his innocence, but was yet liable to fall.

2. The occasion of man's apostacy was Satan's temptation. Gen. iii. 4, 5.

3. Man's fall was voluntary. Satan could tempt, but not force his will. Man might have resisted, and maintained his integrity.

II. The misery resulting from this apostacy; which will appear by considering,

What man lost.

1. His original righteousness. The Spirit retired, grace expired, as necessarily as light disappears when the sun withdraws.

2. His communion with God. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

3. His inward peace. Gen. iii. 10.

4. His hope of heaven, and put himself out of the way to it.

What man became subject to:

1. He was universally depraved, because a slave to sin.

2. Fell under the tyranny of Satan. Eph. ii. 2.

3. Exposed to the wrath of God. Matt. iii. 7.

4. To the accusation of a guilty conscience. Prov. xviii. 14.

5. To the curse of the law. Gal. iii. 10.

6. Exposed to death, with all the pains that lead to it. Rom. v. 12.

7. Condemned to hell.

III. Vindicate the wisdom, goodness, and righteousness of God, in relation to man's apostasy.

1. Lay it down as a sure and general ground that God is righteous in all his ways. Ps. cxlv. 17.

2. When man was made at first, it may be said with equal propriety, as when created anew, "by the grace of God I am what I am." 1 Cor. xv. 10.

3. Man being a rational creature, and capable of serving God by love and choice, for the discovery of these it was not fit that he should in the same instant be brought out of nothing, into a confirmed state of holiness, but kept for a time upon a state of trial and probation, and so be entitled to the reward promised, or the punishment threatened.

4. He had power sufficient to stand, and was under strong obligations to do so, made in God's image, Gen. i. 26, and had the most alluring promise to encourage obedience.

5. The temptation with which he was assaulted might have been easily repelled. Gen. iii. 1.

6. God knew the great ends he would serve in permitting this fall. Magnify his grace to perishing sinners; send his Son to save the lost, his spirit to recover the divine image, deliver from eternal wrath, raise to heaven, and advance his glory.

Improvement:

1. How mutable is the best creature, if left to itself!

2. How different a thing is sin in reality, from what it appears, and the sinner apprehends, when he ventures upon it! Prov. viii. 36.

3. Was man in innocence so soon betrayed? What reason have we to watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation!

4. Is the misery so great into which man fell by sin? how dear should be the name of a Saviour, how desirable an interest in him!

CHRIST'S ASCENSION INTO HEAVEN.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, &c.—Luke xxiv. 50, 51.

Our blessed Lord is gone to heaven, not with a design to be always absent; but to return, and take his people to himself. The heavens must

contain him till the restitution of all things; but then he will come thence; and it is the character of his friends to be looking for him, as they have abundant reason to love his appearing. The manner of his appearing in general is foretold by the angels to his followers, who were gazing after him in his ascent; Acts i. 11; and how that was, is here recorded, as to several circumstances, which cannot but be of comfortable consideration to his sincere followers. "And he led them out," &c.

From these words we may consider,

I. That when our blessed Saviour left this world, he parted with his disciples; did not take them with him. For,

1. Believers are not made such merely for themselves but to serve the Redeemer's interest in the world, and promote his glory. Matt. v. 13—16.

2. Our Lord upon his going away does not insist upon his disciples immediately following after, John xvii. 11, but leaves them for a while, for the display of his wisdom, goodness, &c. in directing them, &c. Ps. xxiii. 6.

3. The Christian is to have time to exercise and to improve his graces; Rom. v. 2—5; to grow into the stature of a perfect man. Eph. iv. 13.

4. Jesus glorified his Father by a life of service and suffering upon earth; and in this respect the servant is more or less to be like his Lord. John xii. 26.

II. Whither he went when he left them: he was carried up into heaven,

1. To take possession of his own glory which he had from eternity. John xvii. 5. Discarding at the same time an anxious concern for his followers whom he left behind. Verse 24.

2. As a triumphant conqueror over sin, Satan, death and hell. Eph. iv. 8—10.

3. To make way for the descent of the Spirit, the Comforter. John xvi. 7.

4. As our great High Priest, to plead the merit of his sacrifice in behalf of the guilty. Heb. vii. 25.

5. As our forerunner, to take possession of heaven for his people, and make all things ready for their arrival. John xx. 17; xiv. 1, 2.

III. The manner in which he parted with them; blessing them; "while he was blessing them," &c. perhaps by praying for them, as Isaac, Gen. xxvii. 28, or Jacob, Gen. xlviii. 16. Or in a way of authority, pronouncing a blessing on them. He blessed them.

1. In conformity to his character and work. It was foretold. Ps. lxxii. 17. He was sent for this purpose. Acts iii. 25, 26. With this he opened his ministry, Matt. v. and with this he left this world.

2. To convince them that his gifts and calling were without repentance. Rom. ii. 29. That he is the same yesterday, &c. Heb. xiii. 8. That he loves them to the end. John xiii. 1.

3. To give them the fullest assurance that he did not go away displeased with them; that he had forgiven all defects and unfaithfulness. He blessed them as a father, his children; as a master his servants; as a King, his subjects; as a Shepherd, his flock; as a Saviour, his ransomed ones.

4. On this day especially, as being a day of joy and gladness to him-

self. He had lately been humbled, and crucified ; he was now going to be exalted, crowned, and enthroned ; and from the most affectionate regard to them, to wipe the falling tear, by the remembrance of the endearing manner in which he took his leave of them.

5. To let them know that he was still theirs ; that they were still thorough objects of his dearest love ; that they might still think and speak of him when out of sight.

6. To comfort and strengthen their minds against the hard treatment they were to meet with from the world after his departure ; that they might cleave to him, and trust in him.

Application :

1. Reflect on the separation between Christ and his disciples as being but for a little time : they will soon meet again. John xvi. 22.

2. Endeavour that this separation be as little as possible : often think and speak of him as a friend you dearly love. 1 Pet. i. 8.

3. In his bodily absence, be grateful for the presence of his Spirit.

4. Think with pleasure on the happy change of his circumstances, raised from the deepest abasement to the highest glory.

5. Let this confirm us in the faith of the fulness of his sacrifice, and triumph in it. Rom. viii. 33, &c.

6. Let it encourage our approaches to the throne of grace. Heb. iv. 14, 16.

7. Is he in heaven, then his interest shall live upon earth ; “ he shall see of the travail of his soul.” Isa. liii. 10, 11.

8. Is he in heaven, let our hearts be there, till he comes to receive us to himself. John xiv. 3.

SUBMISSION TO GOD IN AFFLICTION.

And Aaron held his peace.—Lev. x. 3.

THESE words show the becoming behaviour of a servant of God under a very great and sore affliction, who, through divine assistance, stilled the murmurings of nature, and replied nothing against God : he held his peace. Observe,

I. That the children of God are sometimes liable to severe afflictions, both personal and relative. David complains. Ps. xxxviii. 2. Job ix. 17. 2 Cor. v. 4. And it is in heaven only where all tears shall be wiped from their eyes. Rev. vii. 17. The blessed God intends by their afflictions, their advantage in time and eternity.

1. He never afflicts till there is a real necessity. 1 Pet. iv. 16.

2. In wisdom. Heb. xii. 9, 10.

3. In measure. 1 Cor. x. 13.

4. In love and tenderness. Prov. iii. 12. Heb. xii. 5, 6. Rev. iii. 19.

5. To purify our hearts and affections. Heb. xii. 10.

6. To save us from condemnation. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

7. They are but light and momentary. Ps. xxx. 5. Isa. liv. 7, 8. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

II. What is implied in being silent in trials and afflictions.

Nor a careless indifference. Heb. xii. 5. Nor a sullen, daring obstinacy. Jer. v. 3. Nor a restraint of prayer before God. Nor a restraint of communication to a real friend. Job. xix. 22. But

1. A deep sense of God's hand in what we suffer. Ps. xxxix. 9. Isa. xxxviii. 15. 1 Sam. ii. 6.

2. An humble acquiescence in the justice of his proceedings.

3. A resigning ourselves to his pleasure. Matt. xxvi. 39.

4. Acknowledging his right in us, to do as he thinks best. Job. i. 21.

III. Suggest some observations, with a view to induce to such a gracious temper of mind.

1. God has an unquestionable right to dispose of us and others as he pleases. Rom. ix. 21, 22.

2. He grants many daily mercies which we do not deserve.

3. We have **sinned** against him. Mic. vii. 9.

4. The sufferings of Christ for us, were infinitely greater than ours. Isa. liii. 4, 5. Heb. ii. 10.

5. We shall be adjudged unworthy to reign with him, if we do not suffer with him. Matt. x. 38, 39.

6. In afflicting his people, he has a view to his own glory. Lev. x. 3.

Improvement:

1. To be impatient under affliction, is unbecoming a child of God, considered as a new creature.

2. To oppose our wills to the will of God, is high presumption. Isa. vi. 9.

3. It is inconsistent with our own prayers.

4. It would subject us to the charge of ingratitude to our best friend and benefactor, who hath drawn us to Christ; pardoned our sins; given us the spirit of adoption; and made us heirs of a glorious immortality; and who is, by these very afflictions, preparing us for our heavenly state. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

THE HYPOCRITE'S HOPE.

For what is the hope of the hypocrite, &c.—Job xxvii. 8.

THESE are the words of holy Job: they were expressed in justification of himself, from the uncharitable censure cast upon him by his friends; the principle design of whose discourse was to prove, that he (and all others afflicted like him) must be, if not openly profane, nothing better than a secret hypocrite. So far was he from indulging in any evil way, that he trembled at the thought of the state and end of those who did so. "For what is the hope," &c.

Consider,

I. To whom the character in the text applies. To all those who, in the concerns of religion, act a different part to what they really are. Particularly it applies,

1. To those who pretend entire devotedness to God, while their hearts are divided. Ps. xii. 2.

2. Who profess a regard to the will of God, as the reason, and his

glory as the end of what they do in religion ; while, at the same time, they act from other springs, and for lower and selfish ends. Matt. vi. 1.

3. Who are more careful to appear outwardly religious, than to be really so between God and their own souls. Matt. xxiii. 27, 28.

4. Who put God off with bodily service, while the heart is not engaged in it. Isa. xxix. 13. John iv. 24.

5. Who are partial in their obedience to God, while the real Christian says, Ps. cxix. 128.

II. The hope and the gain of such a character.

1. Their hope relates to a future state of blessedness.

2. It is groundless, without a solid foundation. Col. i. 27.

3. It is fruitless. See the Christian's hope, 1 John iii. 3.

4. It will be cut off. Matt. vii. 23.

And this false hope is generally owing,

1. To ignorance of themselves ; their own hearts.

2. To want of attention to the extent and spirituality of the law of God. Rom. vii. 9.

3. The favourable opinion others have of them.

4. Comparing themselves with open sinners, or lukewarm professors. Luke xviii. 11.

5. The length they go, as to the exercise of what appears to be grace ; abstaining from many sins ; practising many religious duties, &c.

As to their acquisitions ; they may gain,

1. More of this world.

2. The esteem and applause of men.

3. A false peace. Rev. iii. 17.

4. A smooth passage through life.

5. A pompous funeral. But, behold,

III. The dreadful end of such ; expressed in these words, "when God taketh away his soul."

1. His soul, his immortal part, which he has deceived and ruined.

2. God will take it away ; whose power there is no resisting ; from whose presence there is no escape.

3. He will take it away ; perhaps with violence, Prov. xiv. 32, always in displeasure.

4. Take it away from present gains and hopes, to **real** misery, and to the greatest share of it. To all this he is continually liable, and at no time safe from it. While he is crying, peace, peace, sudden destruction is coming upon him.

Improvement :

1. Seriously examine as to your own character : "Judge yourselves, that ye be not judged."

2. Dread nothing more than the hypocrite's hope, and frequently look to the foundation of your own.

3. Bless God if you can give a reason for the hope that is in you ; but do it with fear and trembling ; the final judgment is not yet over.

4. Do nothing to sink your hope, or fill you with overwhelming fear. Think often what you hope for, whom you hope in, and of the ground you hope upon ; and thus prepare for the fruition of your hope in eternal glory.

THE CHRISTIAN WEARY OF LIFE.

I loathe it; I would not live always.—Job vii. 16.

THESE are the words of holy Job. In the bitterness of his soul he expresses his desire to God, rather to be dismissed from this world, than to stay any longer in it.

Let us consider,

I. Why the real Christian would not always live in this world.

1. Not because of his sufferings, although a Christian may, through the pressure of affliction, and the strength of temptation, rashly wish to die. Jonah iv. 3. 'This cannot be justified. But,

2. The Christian would not live here always; because it is the will of God he should not. Gen. iii. 19. Job xxx. 23. He consults the will of his God, living and dying. Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

3. From a concern and zeal for the glory of God; his soul breathes after a state of things, where God is universally acknowledged, adored, loved, and served. Rev. vii. 9, 10.

4. From that love he feels to Christ, he is willing to depart; to be for ever with the object of his affection. Phil. i. 23.

5. From a desire to be conformed to the example of his Lord. 1 John iv. 17. He came into this world, not to abide, but to return. John xvii. 5.

6. Feeling the evils of the present state, and having the prospect of a better: making a just comparison of the value of each, he would not live always. Eccl. i. 4, 14.

7. Having some foretastes of a better world, his attachment to earth is weakened, his desire of immortality increased; he would not live always; he pants after the fulness. Ps. xxxiv. 8; and xvi. 11.

II. What does such a declaration imply? that those who use it aright, are, in a good degree, prepared to die; inasmuch as death cannot be an object of desire, but of dread, to an unprepared soul. And this preparation implies,

1. A deep repentance for sin. Luke xiii. 3.

2. A lively faith in Christ Jesus. Mark xvi. 16.

3. The forgiveness of sin, a consciousness of it. Col. i. 14.

4. Adoption into God's family. Rom. viii. 15.

5. The regeneration of our fallen nature. Tit. iii. 5.

III. To whom may a Christian thus express himself?

1. To God, by way of appeal; as Peter, John xxi. 17.

2. To our fellow-Christians, to make known to them the real state of our souls for their satisfaction as to our sincerity: for God's glory. Ps. lxvi. 16.

3. Ourselves, as a satisfactory evidence of our sincerity, and our love to Jesus Christ. Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

Application:

1. How admirable is the change which the grace of God makes in the Christian! He is saved from the love of life and the fear of death. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

2. What gratitude is due to God for his gospel, by which life and immortality are brought to light! We could never have been willing to part with life, but for the promise and prospect of heaven. 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

3. As ever any of you would say, upon good grounds, "I would not live away," *i. e.* here, make sure work for a better state of things. Amos iv. 12.

GOD'S CONSOLATIONS IN AFFLICTION.

Are the consolations of God small with thee?—Job xv. 11.

THESE are the words of Eliphaz to Job, upbraiding him with his temper and conduct in his afflictions: he charges him with great impiety; *restraining prayer*, and *uttering his iniquity*, &c. This charge, as it respected Job, was false and groundless; but true, it is to be feared, of many others, who are continually poring on what God has laid upon them, or taken from them; while they suffer to pass unnoticed a thousand blessings which he is continually bestowing upon them. This is the evil which Eliphaz exposes, as if it were in Job: and assuredly every good man should always guard against it. "*Are the consolations of God small with thee?*"

Let us consider,

I. The consolations of God.

Consolation is said to be God's, as he is the fountain of it, and all true consolation comes from him.

1. By way of eminency. No comforts like those that come from him; they are the beginnings of heaven.

2. By way of sovereign disposal. None can comfort but God; none like him; without, or in opposition to him. Jer. ii. 13. Isa. li. 12. 2 Cor. i. 3, 4; vii. 6. Luke ii. 25.

3. The consolations of God denote their fulness and variety. Ps. lxxi. 21. Isa. li. 3.

4. Their power and efficacy. Job xxxiv. 28, 29. Isa. lxvi. 13. No trouble or distress can ever balance the consolations of God.

II. When may it be said that the consolations of God are small with the Christian in his affliction? What are the circumstances which indicate this defect?

1. When they are ready to *faint* under their afflictions.

2. When they grow impatient under them; discovering a want of resignation to God's will.

3. When we have recourse to any other method for ease and deliverance from trouble, than that which God has appointed; waiting upon and looking to him.

4. When we are full of anxious thought, *what will become of us*, if our afflictions are continued, or be increased.

And oh, how apt are the very best of men to faint in the day of adversity! as if they had never known any thing of divine consolation: and this may be owing,

(1.) To the *great weight* of affliction itself. How feelingly does Job speak of this! Chap. vi. 2—4. Ps. lx. 3.

(2.) The weakness and imperfection of grace, and the strength of remaining corruption. Their thoughts held down by what they suffer, and wholly taken up about it; their minds so confused and afflicted that they are ready to think God their enemy; they begin to question his love, instead of regarding his comforts. Isa. li. 12—14.

III. Point out the evil of not paying a proper attention to the consolations of God under afflictions. They are *great* in themselves, and ought not to be *small* to us.

1. The consolations *in God* are great. Arising from his *nature* and *perfections*, and the relations in which he stands to his people. All these are the fountain of a believer's consolation: his infinite wisdom, power, goodness, compassion, faithfulness, love, every where, and unchangeable. Jer. xxxi. 12. He is their God. Ps. xlviii. 14.

2. *From God*, are great; arising from the provision he hath made for us in his Son. John i. 16. Luke ii. 25. By his *Spirit*, whose name and office is the Comforter. John xiv. 16. By his *Word*; its promises, which are the believer's song in the house of his pilgrimage: promises of pardon, justification, sanctification, safe conduct through life, and heaven hereafter. By his *ordinances*; from his presence in them, and influence upon them; leading them to say, "It is good for me to draw nigh to God; a day in his courts is better than a thousand any where else."

3. *With God*. 1 Cor. ii. 9. Ps. xxxi. 19.

Application:

1. It is a matter of astonishment that we, who have rebelled against God, should have any consolation from him; he deals not with us according to our sins.

2. Is it so great an evil to treat the consolations of God as being *small*? let his afflicted children beware of this, by giving way to immoderate dejection and sorrow.

3. Let God have the glory of any consolation you may have received, and do yet enjoy.

4. Under all your troubles, make conscience of applying to God, through your Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ, as the fountain of all consolation.

SALVATION OF THE RIGHTEOUS DIFFICULT.

And if the righteous scarcely be saved, &c.—1 Pet. iv. 18.

THESE words are very important and interesting both to the saint and sinner. To the former they show the necessity of great care in the concerns of religion; of watchfulness and circumspection; while to the latter they are awfully alarming.

Let us consider,

I. The character of the persons here spoken of. The *righteous*; the *ungodly* sinner.

The righteous.

1. None are such *legally*. Rom. iii. 10. Job ix. 15.
2. They are such as have believed in Christ; are pardoned and justified. Rom. iii. 25, 26.
3. They delight in the law of the Lord. Ps. i. 2. Rom. vii. 22.
4. Sin has not dominion over them. Rom. vi. 14; and viii. 2.
5. God is the object of their supreme affection. Ps. lxxiii. 25.
6. And from a sense of their own imperfections they rely on Christ for eternal life. Phil. iii. 8, 9.

The ungodly sinner.

They are such as remain in their native, unconverted state. Particularly, they are such,

1. Over whom Satan exercises an uncontrolled dominion. Eph. ii. 2.
2. Alienated from the love of God. Eph. iv. 18.
3. Placing their affections on the world. Luke xii. 20.
4. Without God in the world. Eph. ii. 12.
5. Rebellion against God. Rom. i. 28—32.
6. Neglecting, perhaps rejecting, the only way of salvation by Jesus Christ. Heb. ii. 3; and x. 28, 29.

II. The difficulty of the salvation of the righteous.

The text admits that the righteous shall be saved; their salvation is *certain*, upon their being found faithful unto death.

1. The testimony of scripture secures it. 2 Tim. i. 12; iv. 17. 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

2. This is the purpose of God concerning them. 2 Thess. ii. 13.

3. It was the ultimate end of Christ's sufferings. Heb. ii. 10.

4. Of his ascension into heaven. Heb. vi. 20.

5. God hath promised it. Rev. ii. 10.

6. The work of salvation in the righteous is already begun. Phil. i. 6. Nevertheless, their salvation is here represented as being with difficulty obtained.

1. This difficulty is not owing to any *deficiency* in the love of God, which is universal. John iii. 16.

2. Nor in the death and merit of Christ, which are infinite. Heb. ii. 9. 1 John ii. 2.

3. Nor in the influence of the Spirit. John xiv. 16, 17; xvi. 7, 8. But it is owing chiefly,

4. To the difficulty of the work they have got to do. Tit. ii. 11—14.

5. The opposition they meet with from the world.

6. The influence of evil example which abounds in the world. John xv. 19.

7. The opposition they meet with from Satan. 1 Pet. v. 8.

8. The remains of corruption within.

9. The instability of some Christians, James i. 8, and the apostacy of others. 1 Tim. i. 19, 20.

III. The certain and dreadful misery that awaits the ungodly sinner. The question in the text relating to such may refer,

1. To a time of popular calamity. Luke xxi. 25, 26.

2. To death. Ps. ix. 17.

3. To the day of judgment. What will they do when Christ shall

be revealed? &c. 2 Thess. i. 7—9. When sentence is pronounced?

Matt. xxv. 41. In that awful place,

4. Their punishment will be universal, soul and body.

5. Acute in the extreme. Rev. xiv. 10.

6. Uninterrupted, without mitigation or respite.

7. Without end. Rev. xiv. 11.

Improvement:

1. Is the world divided into the two classes here named? of how much importance is it to know to which we belong, especially as their ends are so extremely different! 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

2. Is the salvation of the righteous difficult? let them hence learn the necessity of diligence and watchfulness. 2 Pet. i. 10.

3. Let the wicked tremble for the consequences of their conduct. Should they live and die such, their destruction is inevitable.

CHRIST, THE SHEPHERD OF HIS FLOCK.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, &c.—Isa. xl. 11.

THIS chapter begins with a command from God to his servants the prophets, relative to that glorious work in which he intended to employ them, verses 1 and 2, and when comfort is to be preached, Christ predicted, is to be the text, of whom we have here an endearing description, both as to the relation he stands in to his people, and as to the manner in which he would manifest it when he came. "He shall feed," &c.

Consider,

I. The character of Christ as here expressed, a Shepherd. He is called,

1. The Shepherd of souls. 1 Pet. ii. 25.

2. The great Shepherd of the sheep. Heb. xiii. 20.

3. The good Shepherd. John x. 11.

4. He was called by the Father to this office and trust. Ezek. xxxiv. 23. "My Shepherd," says God. Zech. xiii. 7.

5. He knows his sheep, John x. 14; their persons, wants, &c.

6. He seeks them. Luke xix. 10. John x. 16.

7. He puts his mark upon them, his image, and is not ashamed of them. Heb. ii. 11.

8. Takes care of them; instructs them; watches over them; defends them.

9. He guides them. John x. 3, 4.

10. He Provides for them. John x. 9.

11. Presents them at last to his Father. Heb. ii. 13. John vi. 39.

II. The conduct of Christ towards his people; he feeds his flock, &c. By whom we are to understand all true believers. John x. 26, 27.

They are called a flock, to express,

1. Their separation from the world. John xv. 19.

2. Their association with each other, for Christian fellowship, Mal.

iii. 16. Many little flocks in different parts, fed by under-shepherds ; but all under the eye and care of the Great Shepherd.

3. Their mutual love to, and defence of, each other, and the cause of true religion. John xv. 17. Jude, verse 3.

4. In Christ's flock there are lambs ; converts, young in years and grace, called elsewhere babes. 1 Pet. ii. 2. Those who are with young ; believers exercised with severe trials, and heavy-laden ; or penitents mourning their sins, brought to the birth and ready to bring forth.

Jesus feeds his flock, &c.

And this food is spiritual ; they have meat to eat the world knows not of, John iv. 32, and of this there is great variety.

1. He feeds his flock with his word. The sacred pages are green pastures. Ps. xxiii. 2 ; xlii. 1, 2 ; cxix. 103. 1 Pet. ii. 2.

2. By the influences of his Spirit. John xvi. 14.

3. With himself. John vi. 48—56.

4. By the dispensations of his providence. John x. 9.

5. By afflictions. Isa. xxvii. 9. Heb. xii. 11.

6. And he pays particular attention to those who want it most. The lambs, who, through want of experience, the remains of corruption, temptations, opposition from the world, unwatchfulness, are apt to go astray, he gathers with his arm, and even, with the greatest affection, carries in his bosom. Those who are with young, he gently leads by the influences of his Spirit, to the promises of his word, for comfort, strength and deliverance. Matt. xii. 20. Heb. iv. 15, &c.

7. And after Christ has thus cared for, and fed his flock for a time, he will lead them to his kingdom, where he will eternally feed, and feast them with the higher entertainments of that celestial state, at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Rev. xix. 9.

GOD'S GRACE SUFFICIENT UNDER TEMPTATION.

My grace is sufficient for thee.—2 Cor. xii. 9.

THE apostle, having been caught up to the third heaven, where he had heard unspeakable words, tells us what happened to him, after his coming back, verse 7. Whatever Satan may design, or the Christian may feel from him, it is to prevent a greater evil, and to do him good, that the Lord permits Satan to attack him.

Under all assaults from hell, the children of God are to send up their cries to heaven, verse 8. And although deliverance is not immediately obtained, they have the promise of God, that in the mean time his grace shall be sufficient for them.

We may consider,

I. That it is no uncommon thing for the people of God to be tempted by Satan.

1. The apostle himself was tempted, verse 7.

2. Pious Job, chap. i. 12.

3. The apostle Peter, Luke xxii. 31.
4. Our blessed Saviour, Matt. iv. 1, &c.
5. And every believer must expect it, if he would fight his way after his Lord, and obtain the victory. Rev. iii. 21.
6. It is in relation to this, that such scriptures as these are given ; 1 Pet. v. 8, 9. Eph. vi. 11—16.

II. The Lord permits this for wise ends.

1. To prevent pride, or to mortify it, if it has got possession of the soul. Verse 7.
2. To correct them for their faults, that they may be more watchful, and given to prayer in future.
3. For the trial of their graces ; it was so with Job. James v. 11.
4. To magnify his power.

III. The promise of assistance, "My grace," &c. This will be sufficient,

1. To restrain the tempter's rage, both as to degree and continuance. "Thus far thou shalt go," &c. See Job i. 12 ; ii. 6.

2. To assure them that their trials shall be proportioned to their strength. 1 Cor. x. 13.

3. To keep their faith from falling under the sorest trials ; and, while we lay hold of the Head, he will hold us, and keep us from sinking. Isa. xli. 10.

4. To deliver them from the evil that Satan intends, and which Christians may sometimes fear, that they shall be finally overcome and perish. Isa. liv. 17.

5. To put an end to the conflict in the fittest season. Rom. xvi. 20.

6. To bring every believer to heaven, where Satan and his messengers can have no place.

7. And this they have good reason to expect, from their relation to God as his children. He is their father ; and their interest in Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour, and merciful High-Priest, who has passed into the heavens on their account. Heb. ix. 24.

Improvement :

1. We see that it is no unusual thing for Christians to be buffeted by Satan : On this account, as well as others, the redeemed in glory have come out of great tribulation. Rev. vii. 14.

2. Beware of entertaining hard thoughts of God and Christ, if not presently delivered from temptation.

3. Get and keep faith in exercise, which is the shield by which all the fiery darts of the devil are to be quenched : that so you may obtain a decisive victory, and obtain the crown that fadeth not away. "And now the God of all grace, &c." 1 Pet. v. 10, 11.

DEATH'S FINAL DESTRUCTION.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death.—1 Cor. xv. 26.

IN the preceding verse it is said of Christ, that he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. In these words, assurance is given that

all his and his people's enemies shall be subdued ; and, in the text, one of the most formidable of these is mentioned, who shall, in the end, feel his conquering power. "The last enemy," &c.

I. Take notice of the enemy here spoken of, *death* ; and what kind of an enemy he is.

1. Death is an enemy as he separates the soul from the body, intimately acquainted, long united.

2. As he puts an end to our state of probation. We are on trial for another world, and death ends that trial.

3. As to what follows upon it : the decay and corruption of the body. Eccl. xii. 7.

4. He is a common enemy ; to young and old, rich and poor, saint and sinner. Eccl. iii. 20.

5. Concealed. We cannot say *how* he will attack us, or *when* ; slowly or rapidly, sleeping or waking.

6. Powerful and irresistible. Eccl. viii. 8.

7. Inexorable. Wealth cannot bribe, eloquence persuade, cries or entreaties move, holiness awe, or otherwise prevail with him to spare.

8. Formidable, as to his forerunners, sickness and pain. Job xxxiii. 19, &c. As it is a leaving this world, friends, relations, employments, &c. Eccl. ix. 10. As it is a passage into an endless state.

II. The comfort suggested here to the Christian, that this enemy shall finally be destroyed.

Death is the Christian's last enemy, which implies,

1. That he has got other enemies ; the devil, the world, and the flesh ; but death is the last. He must encounter the king of terrors, and finish the conflict by dying. Eccl. viii. 8.

2. Whatever enemies may go before death, to the Christian, will be the last : after this, the warfare will be over. Not so the wicked : there will be an offended God, and an everlasting hell afterward. Luke xvi. 23.

He is to be destroyed.

1. By the general resurrection. John v. 28, 29.

2. Christ, the Captain of our salvation, is to accomplish this destruction. Hos. xiii. 14.

And destroyed last.

1. The power of the world, Satan, and sin, with respect to the Christian, shall be completely destroyed before he leaves this world. Heb. xii. 14. And,

2. Death shall be destroyed in the world to come, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life, 2 Cor. v. 4.

Improvement :

1. Let not the Christian be unwilling to yield his body to the power of death ; that power will soon be destroyed. Hos. xiii. 14.

2. Let us look forward with joyful expectation of seeing our Christian friends again, who for a season are subject to the power of this enemy, where we shall triumph in eternal victory and eternal joy. Rev. i. 5, 6.

ADVANTAGE OF SEEKING THE LORD.

But they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.—Ps. xxxiv. 10.

THE belief of God's special care and providence over good men, is a source of great comfort to those who are walking with him; and that they have ground for such a faith, is evident from the words of the text: "They shall not want any good." How cheering is this declaration to the Christian in the midst of his straits and difficulties! That we may apply comfort to whom it is due, let us consider,

I. The characters of the persons who seek the Lord. In general, they are such as are born of God, and so seek him,

1. As one whose favour they prefer to every other consideration. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

2. In his Son, through whom alone they can have access to God. John xiv. 6.

3. In obedience to his commandment, and upon the encouragement of his promise. Ps. xxvii. 8. Isa. xlv. 19.

4. In the use of all the appointed means.

5. With their whole heart. Ps. cxix. 10. Jer. xxix. 13.

6. With diligent perseverance. Matt. vii. 7, 8.

7. In a dependence upon the assistance of the Spirit. Rom. viii. 26.

8. In a hope of seeing him above, which animates all their endeavours, and keeps them from sinking under apparent delays. Lam. iii. 26. Ps. xxiv. 6.

II. The promise of supply he has made to such: "They shall not want any good thing." Even as it respects temporal blessings, so far as will be for their good, and the glory of God: but especially spiritual blessings, which they prefer above all others. Such as,

1. The light of God's countenance. Ps. xi. 7; xxxiv. 15.

2. The protection of his arm. Ps. xc. 1.

3. His presence in affliction. Isa. xli. 10.

4. Seasonable deliverance. 2 Pet. ii. 9. Ps. xci. 15.

5. The conduct of his providence. Ps. xxv. 12; xxxii. 8.

6. Acceptance at the throne of his grace. Prov. xv. 8.

7. And thus seeking the Lord in their passage to eternity, they shall be guided by his counsel, even unto death, and afterwards received unto his glory. Ps. lxxiii. 24.

III. Whence we may infer this supply,

1. From his love to us in the gift of his Son. Rom. viii. 32.

2. From the relations in which he stands to us: a Shepherd; Ps. xxiii. 1; a Father; Matt. vii. 11; a God; Jer. xxx. 22, &c.

3. From his infinite fulness of power and goodness. Col. i. 19.

4. From his gracious promise. Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19. Jer. xxxii. 41.

5. From his extensive care over creatures of an inferior order. Matt. vi. 26, 28, 30.

Application:

1. How happy is the state of those that seek the Lord! Ps. xxiv. 5, 6.

2. How miserable the state of those who live at a distance from God! Ps. xxxiv. 16; lxxiii. 27.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WILL,

A GROUND OF COMFORT.

Unless thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction.—Ps. cxix. 92.

THIS psalm is by far the longest in the book; and as it is long, so it is excellent and engaging. It commends the scriptures, or word of God, to us under several notions; as his statutes, judgments, precepts, testimonies; and here he calls it his law. David found it of use to him at all times, and now he speaks of the advantage he had received from it in the time of distress: "Unless thy law," &c.

I. Consider who they are that delight in the law of the Lord, and what that comfort is which it affords. Those who delight in the law of the Lord are his children; they do, and none else; for none but the children of God are prepared to receive that comfort which it affords. For,

1. They only are enlightened to discover its excellency, and the comfort it affords; to others it is sealed. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

2. They have the highest value for it. Ps. xix. 10; cxix. 97.

3. They have felt its glorious effects upon their minds, making them what they are. 1 Pet. i. 23.

4. Their hearts and ways are suited to the word of God, to receive its consolation. Rom. viii. 5.

The consolation which it affords,

1. Is divine. The consolation of God, from his word, Spirit, heaven.

2. Solid and real. Not in name only, or fancied, or imaginary; yet better felt than expressed. Ps. cxix. 14.

3. Rational and justifiable. 1 Pet. iii. 13.

4. Holy. Comes from a holy word, Spirit, and leads to greater degrees of holiness. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

5. Sometimes vigorous and strong. Heb. vi. 18.

6. The foretaste of heaven, leading the soul upwards to that fulness of joy, &c. Ps. xvi. 11.

II. The benefit resulting from those comforts: we are preserved from perishing in our affliction, sinking under it into despondency.

The law of the Lord discovers to us,

1. That suffering has been the lot of the best men, our Lord not excepted.

2. That afflictions are consistent with God's love to his people. Ps. lxxxix. 32, 33.

3. That afflictions are even proofs of his love. Heb. xii. 6, 7.

4. That afflictions, occasioned by unfaithfulness, are designed not only to punish, but to cure. Isa. xxvii. 9. Ps. cxix. 67. Heb. xii. 6, 7.

5. That at such seasons the Lord has been pleased to grant unusual communications of grace. Hos. ii. 1.

6. And, lastly, the word of the Lord teaches the afflicted Christian that God will be with him when he is dying, Isa. xliii. 2; Ps. xxiii. 4; and that he shall be with God for ever. And thus it is that the delights of the law of the Lord preserve the afflicted Christian from perishing.

Application :

1. Is there so much in the word of God to delight the soul ? What an inestimable blessing is the Bible to the world and the church ! Let us bless God for it ; and frequently, with the greatest attention, read and meditate upon its contents.

2. Let us all strive to be of the number of his children, who are prepared to take the comfort of it.

3. Under all our troubles, let us have recourse to God's word for relief, praying for the Spirit's influence to enlighten our minds in the knowledge of that word, that so we may receive the comfort it suggests.

THE MINISTER'S PARTING BLESSING.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Rev. xxii. 21.

THE dispensation of the law was greatly inferior to the dispensation of the gospel : that was a dispensation of terror and of shadows ; this of mercy and truth. "The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ : " and it is very remarkable, that the Old Testament ends with a curse, the New Testament with a blessing. "The grace," &c.

Consider,

I. What we are to understand by "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The term *grace* is various in its signification. We are to understand it as expressive,

1. Of God's eternal favour to mankind. 2 Tim. i. 9.

2. Of God's special approbation of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Rom. v. 2.

3. Of the loving-kindness of Jesus Christ in dying for sinners. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

4. Of the work of the Spirit in those who believe, changing and renewing their nature ; and this is the meaning of it in the text ; and nothing short of this can enable a person to reply to the intimation of Christ's second coming, in verse 20, "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus !"

And this grace is called "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

1. As it is purchased by him. John i. 17.

2. Treasured up in him. Col. i. 19.

3. And received from him. John i. 16.

II. The apostle wishes true believers to possess this grace, as the most excellent blessing they can enjoy ; and this will appear when we consider,

1. That it distinguishes them from fallen angels. 2 Pet. ii. 4.

2. From the rest of mankind. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. 1 John v. 19. 1 Cor. ii. 12.

3. From their former selves. Eph. ii. 1, 2, 12, 13.

4. That it ennobles the soul. 2 Pet. i. 4.

5. Enriches it. Luke xvi. 11. Col. ii. 2.

6. Sanctifies it. Eph. ii. 8.

7. Leads the soul to Christ. Ps. xvii. 15.

8. And it shall finally terminate in the eternal enjoyment of him. John xiv. 2, 3.

III. Consider the import of the apostle's wish, as it respects this grace being with you all.

1. In youth, as well as old age.
2. In sickness, as well as health.
3. In poverty, as well as riches.
4. In pain, as well as ease.
5. In life, and in death.

Application :

1. Let those who are destitute of this grace, see the necessity of it; to save them from sin, make them happy, and prepare them for heaven.

2. Let those who enjoy it, improve it by continual exercise; and in this case they may expect a glorious increase. Mark iv. 25.

MEN, AS STEWARDS TO GOD, ACCOUNTABLE.

Give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward.
Luke xvi. 2.

THESE words are part of a parable delivered by our Lord; a method of instruction which he frequently made use of during his stay upon earth. The design of our Lord, in this parable, is to excite mankind to the greatest care and diligence in improving their advantages in relation to a future state, from the consideration of a future judgment, when it will be said, "Give an account," &c.

We may consider,

I. That every individual sustains the character of a steward, and as such, an important trust is committed to his care.

1. Reason and understanding. Job xxxii. 8.
2. Time, in which to work out our own salvation, and prepare for eternity. Phil. ii. 12.
3. Bodily health and strength, which qualify for great services in the cause of God.

4. Wealth and riches, with which to do good. Luke xvi. 9.

5. The word and ordinances. Ps. lxxiii. 28.

6. Grace implanted in the heart.

II. That the time of our stewardship will have an end.

1. It will certainly end at death. Some of our talents may be taken from us while we live; reason, health, and riches. But should we be favoured with them as long as we live, our stewardship must end at death: with our last breath our probation ends. Eccl. ix. 10. Heb. ix. 27.

2. It may end suddenly. Matt. xxiv. 44. Our times are in God's hand, and he may cut them off when he pleases.

3. Our stewardship once ended, shall never be renewed again. We must be no longer stewards; no more time allowed, no more means of grace, &c.

III. An account of our stewardship shall be required : “ Give an account,” &c.

1. Each individual must give an account for himself, “ of *thy* stewardship.” Rom. xiv. 12.

2. To Christ, as Judge. Acts xvii. 31.

3. Of our stewardship. The talents we received, whether they were employed, hid, improved, or wasted. Eccl. xii. 14.

4. And this will be the case immediately upon our going out of our stewardship; upon the dissolution of the soul and body. Eccl. xii. 7. Most solemnly at the last day. 2 Cor. v. 10.

Improvement:

1. If we are stewards, how unreasonable to be proud of any talent we possess! we are to be judged for all.

2. How awful will it be, if any of us, as stewards, should receive the grace of God in vain! 2 Cor. vi. 1.

3. As our stewardship will end, what attention should we pay to our character and work as such.

4. What an awful thing it is to die, to appear before God, to give an account of ourselves, &c.

5. Let not the believer faint under the difficulties of his stewardship, seeing it will have an end, and as to him, a most desirable end; and neither the services nor sufferings of the present time are to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed.

THE CHRISTIAN WITH GOD, SUPPORTED BY HIM.

Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand.—Ps. lxxiii. 23.

THESE are the words of the Psalmist just recovering from a deep and sore distress, which he describes in the foregoing verses at large, with the occasion of it. He consoles himself with the reflection, that in his greatest distress he had been with his God, and his God had graciously supported him: “Nevertheless, I am,” &c.

I. What is implied in being continually with God.

As a duty, it implies, that this is peculiar to real Christians; as they alone are prepared for it, and disposed to it, as being acquainted with him, reconciled to him, and in a state of the **most** intimate friendship with him. Amos iii. 3. Many things tend to engage such, in point of duty, thus to be with him.

1. It is God’s express command. Gen. xvii. 1.

2. Their covenant-consent strengthens the obligation, Jer. i. 5, and having opened their mouths they cannot go back.

3. The honour of God, which of all things is the dearest to them, obliges them to it. To forsake him would be a reflection on God and his ways.

4. To this they feel the constraints of love, ver. 25.

5. The blessedness arising from it, and the misery resulting from a contrary conduct, is a farther obligation to this.

6. The sincerity of their love and attachment to God is thereby to be evidenced.

7. And they feel themselves deeply concerned thus to act, as they would not lose their work and their crown, and expose themselves to greater wrath. 2 John 8; Heb. x. 38.

As a privilege, it implies that they are with God,

1. As members of his Son. 1 Cor. xii. 27.

2. As his children. Rom. viii. 14.

3. As his heirs. Rom. viii. 17.

4. As his portion. Deut. xxxii. 9.

5. As his living temple. Eph. ii. 21.

II. The happiness resulting therefrom: the Lord holds them by their right hand. This is necessary,

1. On account of the weakness of their graces. 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2.

2. The remains of the carnal mind. 1 Cor. iii. 3.

3. The prevalence of evil example. 1 Cor. v. 3.

4. The opposition of the world. John xv. 19.

5. The unwearied diligence of Satan. 1 Pet. v. 8.

6. And in all these circumstances God will uphold them, according to his word and promise. Heb. xiii. 6. Isa. liv. 17.

Improvement:

1. How happy is the state of those who walk with God! Let us cultivate a greater intimacy than ever.

2. How dreadful is the state of those who are at a distance from God! Ps. lxxiii. 27.

THE MUTUAL INTEREST BETWEEN CHRIST AND BELIEVERS.

My beloved is mine, and I am his.—Cant. ii. 16.

THIS book is a song of love, and these are some of the sweetest expressions of it. They are the church's triumph in Christ, by an appropriating faith, feeling the happiness arising from an interest in him: "My beloved," &c.

Consider,

I. The nature of that relation which subsists between Christ and believers.

As to Christ, He is theirs,

1. By the appointment of the Father, and that from everlasting. 1 Pet. i. 20. Isa. xlii. 1, 6.

2. By his free and voluntary undertaking of their recovery. Isa. l. 5. Ps. xl. 6—8.

3. As having a regard to them in what he did and suffered. Eph. v. 22—24.

They are Christ's,

1. By the Father's gift; John xvii. 6; as his charge, to be ransomed by his blood; as his reward for his obedience.

2. By right of purchase. 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.
3. By conquest. 2 Cor. x. 5.
4. By self-dedication; in the closet; after some affliction; at the Lord's table.

II. The ends of this mutual relation, on either side.

As to believers :

1. Christ is theirs to answer all the demands of justice, and deliver them from wrath. 1 Thess. i. 10.
2. To rescue them from the power of sin and the tyranny of Satan. Rom. v. 9. 1 Thess. i. 10.

3. To bind up their wounded spirits, and speak peace to their troubled souls. Matt. xi. 28.

4. To restore them to God's favour. Rom. v. 1, 2.

5. To hear and answer their prayers, and to supply all their wants. John xiv. 13, 14.

6. To overrule all things for their good, guide them by his counsel even unto death, and afterwards receive them to glory. Matt. xxv. 34.

And, as to believers,

1. They are Christ's, to listen to, and learn of him, what they are to know, believe, and do, in order to salvation. Mark ix. 7.

2. To obey and please him, as the end for which he redeemed them. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. Phil. i. 21.

3. Entirely to depend on him for all they need, or hope for, as to this world or another. Isa. xlv. 24, 25.

4. To employ every talent they have received from him to his glory. Luke xix. 13.

5. To fight under him, as the Captain of their salvation. 1 Tim. vi. 12.

6. To love and delight in him while they live, and to enjoy him above for ever. When he proclaims from heaven, "Behold, I come quickly," the church replies, "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Rev. xxii. 20.

Application :

1. How wonderful is the method of salvation by Jesus Christ ! that the eternal Son of God should not only be given for us, but given to us !

2. From the mutual and endearing relation between Christ and believers. Let it be remembered, that he observes what is done for and against any of them, and takes it as done to himself. Matt. xxv. 40.

3. This may be considered as a confirmation of their faith, as to their resurrection and future blessedness. Rom. viii. 11.

CHRIST'S DYING REQUEST FOR HIS FOLLOWERS.

Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am ; that they may behold my glory.—John xvii. 24.

THESE are the words of our dying Redeemer, praying over his disciples when about to take his farewell of them, to go to his Father.

Having loved his own, he loved them to the end, and discovered the most anxious concern for their happiness, as to both worlds. As he was now about to leave them, he commends them to the care of his Father, verse 15. And looking up to heaven, whither he was seen to ascend, he with the most affectionate vehemence thus interceded in their behalf, "Father, I will."

I. The character of the persons given by the Father to Christ.

If we examine the context, it will appear that those who are given to Christ,

1. Are such as have received and believed on him, having been previously exercised with a godly sorrow for sin. Verse 8.

2. They are his disciples, his followers; and, as such, a people distinct from the men of the world, different in their views, principles, dispositions, conversation, conduct. Verse 14.

And they are given to Christ,

1. That he may feed and nourish them. Isa. xl. 11.

2. That he may lead and conduct them. Isa. lv. 4.

3. Protect and defend them. Isa. xxxii. 2.

4. Advocate their cause. 1 John ii. 1.

5. Save them from every evil. Matt. i. 21.

6. Receive them to glory. Matt. xxv. 34.

II. The will of Christ concerning them, that they should be with him where he is.

1. In heaven, Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the everlasting kingdom, the celestial paradise, the third heaven, where is his temple, the throne of his presence. Rev. xxi. 23, 24.

2. To be where he is, is to be perfectly freed from all evil, sin, sorrow, pain, persecution, affliction, temptation, and every imperfection. Rev. xxi. 4.

3. To be raised to the highest perfection their natures are capable of; their minds filled with light, their hearts enlarged and filled with ardent love; to be universally holy, without spot; to join the general assembly in contemplating, admiring, praising, and adoring God for ever. Rev. i. 5, 6.

4. To live under the brightest displays of the Divine perfections, and the freest communications of his love and goodness, never to be intercepted nor abated, nor to end. Rev. vii. 17.

5. To be for ever safe under his and his Father's hand. Their God lives for ever, their Saviour never dies; and because he lives, they shall live also. John xiv. 19.

III. The principal design of their being with him, as it is here expressed, to behold his glory.

1. His glory as Immanuel, God and man in one person; a short glimpse of which made Peter cry out, as if in heaven, "Lord," &c. Matt. xvii. 4.

2. As the only begotten of the Father, which he had before the world was. John xvii. 5.

3. Which he has acquired by his mediatorial work, in the salvation of the countless myriads of the redeemed, the effects of the travail of his soul. Isa. liii. 11.

4. Which shall be ascribed to him by all the hosts above, both angels and men. Rev. vii. 9—12.

Application :

1. Let us examine whether we are given to Christ, according to the evidence in the context. Ver. 8—14.

2. Let us be watchful and diligent, that we may not fall short of the glory designed for us. Ver. 12.

3. Let the consideration of that glory reconcile us to our present sufferings. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

THE BELIEVER'S CONSOLATION IN DEATH.

My flesh and my heart faileth, &c.—Ps. lxxiii. 26.

It is appointed for man to die ; there is no discharge in this war. Happy for us will it be, if, in our last and dying moments, we can apply the language of the Psalmist to ourselves : if with him we can say, “let who will share the world among them, God is my portion, and that not for a limited time, but to all eternity.”

Let us consider,

I. What the Psalmist means by the flesh and heart failing.

By the flesh failing, we are to understand death ; this is the notion which is here given us of it. Those two dear companions, the soul and the body, must be parted. The body is like a house subject to decays, and by neglect or violence may be rendered unfit for the soul to inhabit, and so is left by it. The flesh, though now animated by a living soul, will not always be so. “My flesh faileth,” and it may be said to do so,

1. Continually. We die daily ; are gradually decaying and wearing away. Job xiv. 10.

2. Universally. The Psalmist here speaks of himself ; but it is equally true of every one. Eccl. vi. 6.

3. With great variety ; in some early ; in others in their bloom ; with others, not till the shadows of the evening come upon them ; in some gradually, with a gentle hand, in others suddenly, without any warning, or, it may be, visible cause. 1 Sam. xx. 3.

4. Most certainly, without a possibility of prevention ; neither food nor physic will always avail. Eccl. viii. 8.

5. Swiftly. It is but a few days at longest that we are to live. James iv. 14. Job xiv. 1, 2.

6. In death, the flesh fails irrecoverably, as to its being restored to its former state upon earth. Heb. ix. 27. Ps. xxxix. 13.

When the flesh is thus failing in a dying hour, the heart may be ready to fail too, to sink into a state of despondency ; and this may be owing,

1. To severity of affliction. Job xvi. 12.

2. To the recollection of past sins, although forgiven, without eyeing the sacrifice of Christ. Job xxi. 6.

3. To the temptations of Satan. 1 Pet. i. 6.

4. To the loss of our evidence, as to our acceptance with God. Ps. xlii. 5—7.

5. To a suspension of the sensible presence of Christ.

II. The source of our dependence in such awful circumstances, God. "God is the strength of my heart." This the Psalmist, and thousands more, have been able to witness to his glory; and the same support shall be afforded to all those who fear and love him. This may be inferred,

1. From his love to them. Ps. xi. 7.

2. From his ability. Isa. lix. 1.

3. From his infinite presence with them. 2 Chron. xvi. 9.

4. From his faithfulness to his kind promises made to them, and on which he has caused them to hope. Isa. xliii. 1—3.

5. From their interest in him, their portion for ever, "The Lord is my portion," &c. Lam. iii. 24.

What kind of a portion God is, no creature can fully describe. Job xi. 7. We may, however, mention some of the characters that belong to him as such.

1. God is a suitable portion, suited to man's spiritual nature. Ver. 25.

2. All-sufficient portion. Gen. xvii. 1. Eph. iii. 20.

3. Infinite portion: and this is the ground of his being all-sufficient. In him there is infinite mercy to pardon, infinite wisdom to counsel, infinite power to support, infinite grace to enrich, infinite glory to bestow. Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

4. He is an eternal portion. Gen. xv. 1. And on this ground it is, the children of God make their boast. Ps. xlviii. 14.

Improvement:

1. Let the consideration of our flesh failing daily, excite us to a daily preparation for eternity.

2. As God is the strength of our hearts, let us trust in him, in life and death, that he may be our portion for ever.

THE CHARACTER AND FUTURE HAPPINESS OF BELIEVERS.

They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, &c.—Mal. iii. 17.

IN the preceding verse we have the character and good conversation of the people of God in an evil day. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another:" of this God's approbation is recorded. "And the Lord hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him." The text is God's gracious promise concerning them: and "they shall be mine," &c.

Consider,

I. The description here given us of the people of God: they are his jewels.

The persons referred to are the same that are mentioned in the foregoing verse, they that fear the Lord. The fear of God is often expressive of the whole of religion. They that fear God have not only the

form of godliness, but the power also. Jer. xxxii. 40. They have honourable thoughts of God, flee from sin as displeasing to him, watch against the risings of corruptions within, and resist temptation without, make conscience of keeping his commandments, attend his ordinances. Ps. lxxxix. 7. Fear, and look diligently, lest they should fail of the grace of God now, for his glory at last, and come short of heaven, after they have stood fair for it. Heb. iv. 1. They fear and apply to Christ, through whom only they can be delivered from the wrath to come, and accepted of God as to their persons and services. These are the persons whom God calls his jewels; and they may be thus styled :

1. As rare and comparatively few. Deut. vii. 7. God's spiritual Israel are so. Luke xii. 32.

2. On account of their excellency. Ps. xvi. 3.

3. As standing high in his esteem : men prize their jewels. Jer. xxx. 10, 11. Isa. xliii. 4.

4. As he esteems himself honoured by them, and greatly delights in them. Men count jewels their honour as well as their treasure. He who knows their worth, and the purposes for which they are formed, expressly calls Israel "my glory." Isa. xlv. 13.

And it is worthy of remark, the endearing manner in which he speaks of them, as "my jewels."

1. As they have been made such by himself. Titus iii. 5.

2. As he is the owner and disposer of them. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

3. As they are set apart for himself, to serve him on earth, and reign with him in heaven. Ps. iv. 3.

4. God calls them his, to tell us what they are to him, although their worth may be hid from others. Col. iii. 3.

II. What is here said concerning them? they shall be the Lord's in that day, when he shall make them up.

1. By separating them from those of an opposite character. Matt. xliii. 30; xxv. 32.

2. By collecting them all together in one great body, Matt. xxiv. 31. Rev. vii. 9. And this he will do,

At that day.

1. The day of the saints' dissolution, when their souls enter into the joy of their Lord, to be with Christ. Phil. i. 23.

2. The day of the general resurrection. That is the day on which God will, in the most eminent manner, make up his jewels, by raising all their bodies, reuniting soul and body, and taking them to his kingdom and glory. And

They shall be his at that day.

1. They were his before, seeing that he redeemed and saved them : but he shall at that day,

2. Publicly testify his knowledge and approbation of them; and thus put

3. To shame and silence the hard censures of their malignant foes. And,

4. Tend to the greater confusion of the prince of darkness. And,

5. Such a declaration will challenge the praises of the redeemed to their faithful Lord, who shall have thus perfected that which concerns them. Rev. i. 5, 6.

And this shall be done by the Lord of hosts ; which may be considered as a ground of hope and comfort to those of whom he here speaks.

1. As his power is more than equal to that of all their enemies. Rom. viii. 31.

2. And if this title is referred to his people, it intimates the number of those he will own at last ; they will be many. Heb. ii. 10. Rev. vii. 9.

Application :

1. What a glorious change has God wrought in those who are his jewels !

2. As there is a day coming when they shall be made up, let those who are his jewels often think of it, and love it, together with his appearing. Tit. ii. 13.

3. What a great loss to the world is the removal of these jewels by death ! but let it be our comfort to reflect, that what earth loses in this way, heaven gains.

THE IMMUTABILITY OF CHRIST.

But thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.—Heb. i. 12.

THESE words are a description of Christ, full of comfort to all that fly to him ; as displaying the eternity of his person and office, being and perfections. Whatever changes are made every year in persons and families, Jesus Christ is unchanged still ; as able and willing to save this year as the last, or any year or age that is gone before. “Thou art the same,” &c.

Consider,

I. What Christ is in himself.

1. As to his person, he is the Eternal Son of God, who existed from everlasting. John i. 1.

2. As to his office. He is Mediator between God and man, fitted for it by assuming our nature into a personal union with the Divine, that as God and man in one person he might transact with both. Though he was not incarnate till the fulness of time, he was appointed early to the office of Mediator, and consented to undertake it : and so he speaks of himself as set up, &c. Prov. viii. 23.

When man sinned and needed a mediator, he is promised as the seed of the woman ; and in the season fixed, the Word is made flesh. Gal. iv. 4, 5.

This is he that Jacob acknowledges as the Angel that redeemed him from all evil ; whom Job trusted in as his Redeemer ; whose day Abraham rejoiced to see and was glad ; who at length came from the Father, and having died, rose again, and went back to his glory, and now lives, &c. Heb. vii. 25.

II. What believers have found him to be unto them.

1. It was Christ who awakened them to a sense of their lost, miserable state. Eph. ii. 1.

2. Who received them upon their applying to him for mercy and salvation, and believing on him, he pardoned all their sins. Col. i. 14.

3. Who adopted them into his family, and gave them the earnest of their inheritance. Rom. viii. 15, 16.

4. Thus passing into the number of his children, he continues to bless them, by subduing their corruptions by his Spirit, giving them grace sufficient against the powers of darkness, teaching and helping them to pray, and answering their prayers; admitting them to intimate communion with himself, and in a peculiar manner manifesting himself to them, &c. &c. John xiv. 21, 22.

5. At death he receives their departing spirits, to be with him in glory, watches over their bodies in the grave, and will raise them at the great day, to join their happy spirits in glory; and, as a pledge of this, Enoch and Elijah are already with him. John v. 28, 29.

III. As to all this, the text is applicable to Christ. "Thou art the same," &c.

1. He is the same in himself, as to his person and offices.

2. As to his interest in his Father, and acceptance with him: the Beloved, in whom he is always well pleased. Matt. iii. 17.

3. And with regard to us, the same as to his ability and willingness to save. Heb. vii. 25.

4. The merit of his death is the same it ever was. Rev. v. 6.

5. And he is the same, to pardon, justify, sanctify, and glorify.

Application :

1. If he is the same, let every Christless sinner seek an interest in Christ with the same diligence that ever any did; such have the same necessity, and the same encouragement.

2. Despair, under the gospel, is most unreasonable; seeing Christ came to save sinners, assures us of his having saved the chief of sinners, and represents himself as, after all, the same.

3. Let believers rejoice in Christ as unchangeable. On this account they should rejoice evermore; as well as pray without ceasing, and in every condition give thanks.

THE LOVE OF GOD THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE.

Keep yourselves in the love of God, &c.—Jude, verse 21.

As our blessed Redeemer is gone to heaven to prepare mansions for his followers with a promise of returning again, it is natural to inquire, what they are to do in the mean time? how they are to conduct themselves during his absence, with a view to his return? We have the answer to this in the text, "Keep yourselves," &c.

1. The object to which our attention is here directed, the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Eternal life.

1. This implies deliverance from all sin. Rev. xiv. 5.

2. The resurrection of the body from the power of the grave. John v. 29.

3. Deliverance from the second death. Rev. xxi. 8; xx. 6.

4. The everlasting enjoyment of God in his kingdom of glory. Matt. xxv. 34.

And this is to be obtained through mercy, the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ manifested to us.

1. In convincing us of sin by his Spirit. John xvi. 8.

2. Forgiving our iniquities. Col. i. 14.

3. Inspiring our hearts with a hope of heaven. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

4. And sanctifying our nature, as a preparation for the kingdom of heaven. Tit. ii. 14; iii. 5.

The mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. He purchased it for us, both grace and glory. 1 John v. 11, 12.

2. He prepares it for us. John xiv. 2. And us for heaven, by his Holy Spirit making us meet, &c. Eph. i. 13.

3. And gives it to us. John xvii. 2; x. 28.

II. Our duty in relation thereto : we are to keep ourselves in the love of God, and be looking for this mercy, &c.

We are to keep ourselves in the love of God.

1. By loving him. Prov. viii. 17.

2. By keeping ourselves free from the love of this world. 1 John ii. 15, 17.

3. By keeping from sin. Ps. xcvi. 10.

4. By keeping his commandments. John xv. 10.

5. By labouring after a growth in grace. 2 Pet. iii. 18.

6. By maintaining the communion of saints. Mal. iii. 16, 17.

Looking for this mercy to eternal life ; which implies,

1. That our thoughts are frequently employed about it.

2. That our faith in reference to it, is kept in lively exercise. Heb. xi. 1, 3, &c.

3. That our hearts are continually set upon it. Matt. vi. 24.

4. That we patiently wait till we are called hence to the enjoyment of it. Heb. vi. 12. The Christian has need of patience, and he has ground for it, too. James v. 7.

5. That we are seriously watchful and diligent in preparing for it. Matt. xxiv. 44.

Application :

1. Is it mercy that bestows eternal life ? how unreasonable, then, is the sin of despair !

2. Is it the mercy of Christ ? how destructive the folly of those who seek it any where else ! Acts iv. 19.

3. What obligations are we under to Jesus Christ, for procuring eternal life for us ! Ps. ciii. 1—3.

4. How deservedly precious is Christ to them that believe ! 1 Pet. ii. 7.

THE HAPPINESS OF DYING IN THE LORD.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead, &c.—Rev. xiv. 13.

THESE words are a voice from heaven, concerning the future state of those that die in Christ; and surely none are better qualified to comfort those who are left behind, than one of the heavenly company.

Our blessed Lord tells his disciples, when sinking into despondency at the idea of his leaving them, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto my Father;" John xiv. 28: so, when the believer dies, he goes to be with him; and, that we may not sorrow as those who have no hope, the text tells us, that they are not lost by ceasing to live in this world, but are advanced to an infinitely better life than this: "Blessed are the dead," &c.

Consider,

I. What it is to die in the Lord, and who may be said to do so.

This may be said of the martyrs who die for the Lord, and seal the truth of their profession with their blood. It is applicable also to all real Christians, who are united to Christ, and die the members of his mystical body: these die in the Lord. And, in order to this, something is previously necessary.

1. That they be quickened and made alive by the Lord. John v. 20, 21. Eph. ii. 1.
2. That they be pardoned, justified, and sanctified. 1 Cor. vi. 11.
3. That they walk after him. Heb. xii. 2. 1 Pet. ii. 21.
4. That they live to him, as they receive all from him. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. Phil. i. 21.

Something is implied.

1. That we die in submission to his will, when, where, and how he pleases. Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

2. In dependence upon him for life and immortality. 1 John v. 11.

3. A sincere desire to be with him. Phil. i. 23.

II. Wherein their blessedness consists; and the text tells us, that "they rest from their labours."

1. Arising from the evils to which they were subject in this world: disease, pain, want, &c. "Many are the afflictions," &c. P's. xxxiv. 19. All shall be left behind at death. Rev. xxi. 4.

2. From Satan's temptations. After death they shall be placed beyond the reach of his fiery darts. These they shall have left in the field of battle, and be "where the weary are at rest." 1 Pet. v. 8. Job iii. 17.

3. From the persecution of the ungodly. John xv. 20.

4. From the remains of the carnal mind, wanderings in duty, and the imperfections of the best of our religious services.

"Their works follow them."

All the works they have done for God and his Christ, to advance his glory, prepare themselves for his kingdom, and serve his interest, and to help on others to it. These works shall follow after, so as to enter with them, and that in the most endearing manner.

1. In God's faithful remembrance of them all. Heb. vi. 10. Mal. iii. 16.
2. In the recompense of reward, which God will bestow. 1 Cor. xv. 58.
- III. Why this message is so solemnly proclaimed by "a voice from heaven."

1. To let an unthinking world know what becomes of the friends of Christ when they die.

2. To assure believers that death is no hinderance to their happiness ; but the certain, though awful way to it.

3. To leave it on record, to the end of time, for the assurance of every Christian, that their rest is not here, and to excite them to look after one remaining.

Application :

1. Are the dead, who die in the Lord, blessed ? How miserable are they who die out of him ! and if the former are blessed immediately, henceforth from the time they die, so the latter must be wretched immediately upon their dying.

2. How much better to a believer is the day of his death than the day of his birth ; seeing he is born to labour, but dies to rest.

THE ADVANTAGE OF EARLY PIETY.

Who also were in Christ before me.—Rom. xvi. 7.

THESE are the words of St. Paul, and they discover his humble and amiable spirit. He speaks of himself as one born out of due time, 1 Cor. xv. 8, seeing that Christ was seen of him so late ; and he reckons it to the greater honour and advantage of others who were sooner converted to him : that were believers in Christ while he was a persecutor ; in a state of grace, while he was in a state of nature ; pardoned in the blood of Jesus, and following him in faith and holiness to heaven, whilst he was a stranger, and an enemy to God. "Happy they," as if he said, "who were sooner rescued and recovered, washed and sanctified, &c. before I was. Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me."

Consider,

I. What we are to understand by being in Christ.

To be in Christ, is,

1. To have a special, or particular interest in his death, so as to enjoy the effects of it ; pardon, justification, sanctification, &c. and this in contradistinction to that general interest which all men have therein. 1 Tim. iv. 10.

2. To be united to him in faith and affection, so as to dwell in him, and he in us. 1 Cor. vi. 17. John vi. 56.

II. The blessedness of being in Christ ; and this may be seen, In the union itself.

1. As it is intimate and endearing. Rom. vi. 5. Eph. i. 23. John xiv. 20. 1 John iv. 13. "He is touched with a feeling of our infirmities."

Heb. iv. 15. In all our afflictions he was afflicted. Col. i. 24. Their sufferings and enemies are his. Acts ix. 4.

2. As it is most honourable. They are reckoned the off-scouring of all things, 1 Cor. iv. 13, yet they are allied to the Lord of glory. Eph. v. 30. Isa. xliii. 4.

3. As it is enriching. It lets into a participation of Christ: "His riches are unsearchable." Eph. iii. 8. 1 Cor. ii. 9. John i. 16. Eph. i. 3. Christ is heir of all things, Heb. i. 2, and believers are joint heirs with him. Rom. viii. 17.

4. As it is most comfortable. Abundant peace and support must be the consequence: this union alleviates every affliction, and sweetens every mercy, &c.

5. As it is immediate. They are members of his body, and all in him. There is but one corner-stone laid in Zion; and believers are spiritual stones, a spiritual house, 1 Pet. ii. 5, 6, a habitation of God. Eph. ii. 22.

This blessedness will farther appear, if we consider the blessings believers receive in consequence of this union.

1. They have their sins pardoned. Col. i. 14. Ps. xxxii. 1.

2. They are delivered from all condemnation. Rom. viii. 1.

3. From the reigning power of sin. Rom. viii. 2. John viii. 36.

4. From the tyranny of Satan. Col. i. 12, 13.

5. They enjoy God's favour. Rom. v. 1.

6. They are his children. John i. 12. Eph. ii. 19.

7. They are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Rom. viii. 17.

8. They have free access to his throne. Heb. iv. 16. John xiv. 13, 14.

9. God and his Christ dwell with such. John xiv. 23.

10. And they have the promise of a glorious resurrection to life eternal. Rom. viii. 11. Phil. iii. 21: and to be for ever with the Lord. 1 Thess. iv. 17, 18.

III. The advantage of being in Christ early. And, as it respects young persons, there are various inducements to hasten their choice of Christ, that they may be one with him.

1. It will preserve them from sin, to which youth are prone, Eccl. xi. 10, and prevent painful reflections for past follies. Job xliii. 26.

2. They will be prevented from being destructive examples to others.

3. They will thereby be fitted for eminent services for God and their generation. Philem. verse 11.

4. Such are particularly dear to God. Jer. ii. 2. Hos. xi. 3; xiv. 3. See what tenderness Christ manifests to his lambs. Isa. xl. 11. John, the youngest of his disciples, leaned upon his breast, and is called "the disciple whom he loved." John xxi. 20.

5. Hereupon their great work upon earth will be over, being early prepared for a blessed eternity; and death, which to others is the king of terrors, will be to such a blessing. 1 Cor. iii. 22.

6. And if they are spared longer, by being early in Christ, they will have an opportunity of making greater proficiency in grace, and so enlarge their capacity for greater glory; and so an entrance shall be administered abundantly, &c. 2 Pet. i. 11.

Application :

1. If it is the happiness of some to be in Christ before others, how miserable must it be to be in a Christless state, Eph. ii. 12, without Christ, without hope !

2. How dangerous must it be to rest in a mere profession of religion ! Matt. vii. 21.

3. How unreasonable is the backwardness of sinners to come to Christ !

4. And how thankful should those be who are sensible of their interest in Christ ! Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

THE

ABUNDANCE OF DIVINE GOODNESS.

And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.—Luke xiv. 22.

THESE words are part of a parable, in which much of the mystery of the gospel is contained ; and the manifest design of it is, to show that, however successful the gospel of Christ has been in time past, sinners may yet come, and be received by Christ, and be for ever saved : “ Wisdom hath built her house,” &c. Prov. ix. 1 ; and amongst the highly-favoured guests, who are partaking of this joyful feast, “ yet there is room.”

Consider,

I. Where there is room.

1. In the mercy of God. It is over all his works, and from everlasting. Ps. cxlv. 9. It belongeth unto God. Ps. ciii. 17. Ex. xx. 6. Isa. xxx. 18. Ps. cxlvii. 11.

2. In the merits of Christ. He is an all-sufficient Saviour. Heb. vii. 24, 25. 1 John i. 7. The merit of his death is unbounded, as it respects man. 1 John ii. 2.

3. As to the power and efficacy of the Spirit to renew and change the hardest heart. Such a change is necessary ; we have destroyed ourselves ; and if ever we are recovered, it must be by help from heaven. Hos. xiii. 9. The conversion of a sinner is the Spirit’s work ; Titus iii. 5, 6 ; which the Father hath promised ; Luke xxiv. 49 ; engaged to pour out. Zech. xii. 10. Christ died to open a way for it. Gal. iii. 13, 14.

4. In the household of faith. More members may be added to Christ’s mystical body : in order to this, the gospel is preached ; the ministers of Christ labour, encouraged by the extensive request of their Master Christ, a little before his death. John xvii. 20. There is yet plentiful provision in our Father’s house. Hos. xiv. 5. Those who come into the vineyard at the third, sixth, or ninth hour, do not hinder others from being invited and received at the eleventh ; Matt. xx. 8, 9 ; and we are still to pray that his kingdom may come, which is capable of increase, both as to number and perfection.

5. In the mansions of glory. They are many. John xiv. 2, 3 ; and

all who overcome here, shall be made pillars there. Rev. iii. 12. The city is prepared for them. Heb. xi. 16; for this, Jesus died. Heb. ii. 10; for this he prays. John xvii. 24. He has declared so much; John xii. 26; and when he shall appear, they also shall appear with him, &c. Col. iii. 4.

II. For whom there is room.

In general, there is room for all sorts and conditions of men; those of one kingdom and country as well as another. The gospel is sent into all the world, and to be preached to every human creature capable of hearing. Mark xvi. 15. But more particularly,

1. There is room for the meanest and most despicable in the world. God is no respecter of persons. 1 Sam. xvi. 7. The things of the kingdom are revealed to babes. Eph. vi. 9. Not many wise or noble are called. 1 Cor. i. 26—29; the poor are chosen. James ii. 5. Lazarus in Abraham's bosom was once a beggar. Luke xvi. 22. Jesus himself was poor while on earth. Matt. viii. 20.

2. The rich men are under no necessity of perishing, there is room for them. Their situation is indeed critical, Matt. xix. 24; their salvation very difficult; Mark x. 25. Luke xviii. 23; they must be delivered from trusting in riches; and with God this is possible, Matt. xix. 26.

3. The afflicted must not be forgotten, there is room for them. The pains of the body are no proof that God will not have mercy on the soul. Some of the most eminent saints have been in the furnace of affliction, as David, Hezekiah, Job: God has caused many to pass under the rod, that he might bring them into the bond of the covenant. Ezek. xx. 37.

4. There is yet room for such as have long stood out neglecting, and making light of the invitations of the gospel. 2 Cor. vi. 2. The compassionate Redeemer is still saying, "Behold," &c. Rev. iii. 20.

5. There is yet room for such as have backslidden; having fallen into sin, after the most promising beginnings. Jer. iii. 22.

Lastly, to add no more: there is yet room for the chief of sinners. Pardon and peace were first proclaimed to those who crucified our God; Luke xxiv. 47; see 1 Tim. i. 15; and all that labour and are heavy-laden are promised rest. Matt. xi. 28.

Application:

1. How justly may the gospel be called a joyful sound!

2. What encouragement for gospel-ministers still to preach this gospel! "Yet there is room."

3. When Satan suggests, "It is too late to repent, and be saved," he may be silenced by the text, "Yet there is room."

4. Let none take encouragement from the text, to make light of the invitations of the gospel, or put off their repentance. For although there is room in the kingdom of grace and glory, yet we should remember there is room in the grave, and in hell too: and how many have sunk into both, while neglecting their salvation.

5. This may be a source of consolation to pious souls, respecting their unconverted friends and relatives. They may yet be saved, for "yet there is room."

6. Being called into the kingdom of grace, and finding there is room, let this confirm your faith and hope, as to your reception to glory.

CHRIST AS THE BELIEVER'S LIVING REDEEMER.

For I know that my Redeemer liveth.—Job xix. 25.

THESE are the words of holy Job, to which, by the most solemn introduction, he invites a special regard. He here utters what he thought would bear him out in wishing so earnestly as he does: "Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were printed in a book! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever!" Upon which the text comes in as the reason of all, "For I know," &c. These words are an abundant source of consolation to afflicted Christians: though their outward comforts drop off like leaves in autumn, and troubles roll in as the waves of the sea, breaking one on the neck of another, such have enough to support their souls, and keep their hope from dying, while they can look up and say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

In speaking from these words, I shall show,

I. How the title of Redeemer belongs to Christ.

The word here rendered Redeemer signifies kinsman; and, among the Jews, it was customary for such to redeem the person or possession of a brother, when sold or detained, and set them free. Ruth iii. 9—13; iv. 1—3. Now, in allusion to this, Christ is fitly called our Redeemer, upon a threefold account:

1. In regard to the miserable state of bondage in which he finds us. By transgression we have fallen from God, forfeited our inheritance to his justice; our persons, as guilty malefactors, are liable to his flaming wrath, without any hope of heaven, bound over to an everlasting hell, and no power to escape, subject to the tyranny of Satan. Eph. ii. 2. Such is our condition by nature; and hence the necessity of redemption.

2. Such is the grace of Jesus Christ, that he stoops into a near relation to us; becomes, by incarnation, our kinsman after the flesh, that he might have right to redeem. If ever we are recovered, the same nature that sinned must suffer. Heb. ii. 14.

3. Being entered into the relation, he performs the part of a kinsman; redeeming us from our state of bondage and misery; and this two ways.

(1.) By price. He paid the price of our redemption, which was the greatest that was ever paid, his blood. 1 Pet. i. 18. And this was absolutely necessary; Heb. ix. 22; and his blood being shed, we have redemption through his blood, &c. Col. i. 14.

(2.) To complete our recovery, and fulfil his office, he also rescues us by power, from the tyranny of Satan; compelling that potent, malicious enemy to let his captives go; Heb. ii. 14. Col. ii. 15; and being now ascended, he pursues the victory, by opening sinners' eyes; Acts xxvi. 18; binds Satan, and takes his goods. Matt. xii. 29.

Thus by price, and by power, as a lamb, and as a lion, appeasing God, and conquering Satan, purchasing heaven, and delivering from hell, is the great Immanuel become our Redeemer. Thanks be to God, that help is laid upon one so mighty to save!

II. Believers will, and ought to apply to Christ, the living Redeemer,

for relief and comfort in all their troubles. They should always be sensible of their necessity and obligations to do so, inasmuch,

1. As fallen creatures, there is no coming unto the Father but through a Mediator; or, in Job's language, "a day's-man." Job ix. 33.

2. Christ is the only Mediator between God and man; such a Redeemer as there is no other. We must, therefore, look to him in trouble, as he is Head over all things to his church. Eph. i. 22, 23.

3. He is provided and exalted of God to this very end, that the weary and heavy-laden, under whatever burden, might apply to him for rest; and hereby "honour the Son as they honour the Father." And those who thus apply to him shall find his promise sure. 1 Pet. ii. 6.

4. To them that believe he is precious, from the experience they have had of his power and grace. 1 Pet. ii. 7. When troubled, in him they have found peace. John xvi. 33.

III. It is a source of consolation to believers, in looking to Christ as the Redeemer, to know that he liveth, and that he is theirs.

This may be said of him as God, and as Immanuel, God-man. He liveth,

1. As God. He is from everlasting to everlasting. The Word was God, as well as with him; John i. 1; and having undertaken our recovery, he speaks of himself as set up from everlasting. Prov. viii. 23. Job says, "My Redeemer liveth," intimating his eternal existence, without any distinction of time, past or to come. He believed him as the Deity, and says of him, "In my flesh shall I see God." As to his divinity, he was before Abraham. John viii. 58.

2. As Immanuel, God with us, it may be said, our Redeemer liveth. Rev. i. 18. And how much this contributes to a believer's comfort, will appear from the following considerations:

(1.) As it shows the value and efficacy of his death and sacrifice; that what he did and suffered is well-pleasing to God, and available for the recovery of man. Rom. iv. 25.

(2.) His living again confirms the truth of his doctrines and promises, as to what he was, and what he would bestow upon his followers, in this life and in another. Though he was put to death as a man, and vile malefactor, he is now declared to be the Son of God, &c. Rom. i. 4, also v. 10.

(3.) It is no small addition to a Christian's comfort, that Christ lives in heaven. He has regained the celestial paradise that we had lost. Heb. i. 3.

He liveth, and is "ascended to his Father and our Father," &c. John xx. 17, and by abiding with him, clearly shows that his satisfaction for sinners is perfect and everlasting; and so his interest above can never fail. John xvi. 8—10.

He liveth, and is preparing mansions in the invisible glory, whither, as forerunner, he is for us entered. John xiv. 2, 3. Heb. vi. 20.

He liveth, and appeareth in the presence of God for us, as our powerful Mediator and Advocate with the Father. Heb. ix. 24. 1 John ii. 1. The Father heareth him always, and is ready to supply all our wants, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Phil. iv. 19.

He liveth, as the fountain and principle of life to us, "the author and

finisher of our faith;" Heb. xii. 2; and because he lives we shall live also. John xiv. 19.

He is theirs.

This is a source of strong consolation to the heirs of promise, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them; who can say, My Beloved, my Saviour, my Redeemer, is mine. Cant. ii. 16.

He is theirs, whose riches are unsearchable; Eph. iii. 8; in whom all fulness dwells; Col. i. 19; whose power saves to the uttermost: Heb. vii. 25; whose person is altogether lovely; Cant. v. 16; whose love is stronger than death; Cant. viii. 6; it passeth knowledge. Eph. iii. 19.

He is theirs, by the call and appointment of the Father; the Beloved in whom they are chosen and accepted. Eph. i. 6.

He is theirs, by voluntarily undertaking their recovery: he gave himself for his church; Eph. v. 25; laid down his life for the sheep. John x. 11.

He is theirs, by mutual consent and intimate union; introduced by the Spirit on his part, and faith on theirs. Hos. iii. 3.

He is their head and husband, physician and friend; their teacher, Saviour and Lord; their sacrifice, surety, ransom, advocate; every thing that their souls can need. Col. iii. 11.

He is theirs, and his Word and Spirit, promises and providences, blessings temporal, spiritual, and everlasting, are theirs too; all things are theirs, who have Christ for theirs. 1 Cor. iii. 22.

III. How believers may draw suitable support hence, under the trials with which they may be severely exercised.

1. I begin with what they feel on account of the church when in low circumstances; when it goes ill with Zion, and Babylon triumphs. But the Redeemer liveth, who purchased the church with his blood, Acts xx. 28, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail; Matt. xvi. 18; and who will make his enemies his footstool. Ps. cx. 1. He liveth, and hath the turning of all the great wheels of providence, and hath the hearts of the greatest in his hands; hath in time past watched over his church, and delivered Zion in her greatest straits. Ps. xxv. 22.

2. Public calamities, wars, storms, and tempests, pestilential diseases, and desolating judgments. This is Christ's voice to all his, "Be not terrified." Luke xxi. 9. He liveth, who is Lord of hosts, the only potentate, 1 Tim. vi. 15, whom winds and seas obey; Matt. viii. 27; without whom nothing can befall me; who can set a mark on my habitation, as well as my soul, that the destroying angel shall pass over; or, if I am permitted to fall, he liveth, from whose love nothing can separate; and when, and however I go, it will be to him.

3. In poverty and in want. Though stripped, like Job, or begging, like Lazarus, he liveth, whose eye sees and pities me; whose is the earth and the fulness thereof; Ps. xxiv. 1; who fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes; John vi. 5—14; who multiplied the widow's oil and meal. 1 Kings xvii. 14—16.

4. As to bodily afflictions and bereaving dispensations of Providence. He liveth, "who was a man of sorrows," &c. Isa. liii. 3, and who has promised, "that all things shall work together for good to them that love him." Rom. viii. 28.

5. As to the temptations of Satan. He liveth, who is exalted above principalities and powers; Eph. i. 21; who was in all points tempted like us; Heb. iv. 15; who prays for us as well as Peter: Luke xxii. 32; who has promised sufficient grace; 2 Cor. xii. 9; and who hath promised final victory. Rom. xvi. 20.

6. As to remaining corruption. He liveth, whose blood cleanseth from all sin. 1 John i. 7.

7. When the believer is dying, it will comfort him to know that his Redeemer liveth, who hath the keys of death and the invisible world: who will open the passage at the fittest time, and accompany him in his passage to his throne. Ps. xxiii. 4.

Improvement:

1. How much does it concern every one to have an interest in this living Redeemer! When we are afflicted, tried, and dying, what can equal our being able to say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth?"

2. Let those who can say so, endeavour to follow his steps: Phil. ii. 5. 1 John ii. 6; and then such will, at last, prove the truth of that promise, John xii. 26.

THE BELIEVER'S CHOICE AND PREFERENCE OF CHRIST.

Whom have I in heaven but thee? &c.—Ps. lxxiii. 25.

THESE are the words of a saint, upon a serious survey of both worlds, fixing on God as his portion and chief good: they express the peculiar feelings of such a one when he first comes to God, and afterwards renews his covenant with him. The Lord's portion is his people. Deut. xxxii. 9, and he also is theirs. Their choice of him is hearty and particular. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." And the text is expressive of the satisfaction they have in him, and it is such as they can find in none else: "Whom have I," &c. Consider.

I. How God is to be considered, when the Christian speaks thus of him.

1. Not absolutely, or as, in himself, clothed with majesty, armed with justice; of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; inclined to punish it, and, by almighty, irresistible power, able in the most terrible manner to do so. Thus considered, he is a consuming fire; and it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands. Heb. x. 31, see also Ps. cxliii. 2. The consideration of an absolute God, is what even his own children cannot bear. But,

2. As God in Christ, having given his Son for us. John iii. 16. "Having delivered him up for us all." Rom. viii. 32. In Christ he is full of compassion to lost sinners: "fury is not in him." He is the Father of mercies, the God of all grace and comfort; 2 Cor. i. 3; his name and nature is love. 1 John iv. 8. And thus, under the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ, the believer says with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?"

II. What the Christian may have in view, in earth or heaven, which is desirable, but to which he prefers his God.

To begin with the world in which we live: "There is none on earth that I desire besides thee."

1. Deliverance from present evils, as sickness, pains, losses, disappointments, &c. A freedom from these is desirable; but this would not compensate for the loss of the Divine presence and favour.

2. The enjoyment of temporal goods; riches, honours, friends, and all necessary accommodations for pleasure and delight. These are what the world admire and pursue; but the Christian prefers his God to them all. Ps. iv. 6.

3. The ordinances and means of grace. How earnestly does David desire these! What delight has he in them! Ps. lxxxiv. 1—4. How vehemently does his soul desire to "dwell in the house of the Lord!" But for what? only to sit under his ordinances? No; but "to behold the beauty of the Lord;" Ps. xxvii. 4; for this he declares in Ps. xliii. 3, 4, and again in Ps. lxiii. 1, 2. No freedom from evil, enjoyment of temporal good, external ordinances, can satisfy the pious mind, without the sensible enjoyment of the presence of God: "There is none on earth," &c.

Let us look higher, to heaven. Here are many things desirable, but still these will not do in the place of God.

1. The glory of the place is transcendent. Rev. xxi. 10—27.

2. The company is desirable; angels and glorified saints. Rev. vii. 9—11.

3. Their employment is glorious. Rev. vii. 10—12.

4. The fulness of joy lies in the presence of God, and in being with Christ. This is what the Christian most ardently desires above all other things in heaven, or upon earth. Ps. xvii. 15.

III. Whence is it that nothing short of God can satisfy the believer?

1. That which satisfies, or makes us happy, must be suitable to our natures. This cannot be said of any created good. Our souls are spiritual, and their desires boundless; and who but he, whose perfections are infinite, can suit or satisfy these? This is the encouragement God gives Abraham, *i. e.* his all-sufficiency. Gen. xvii. 1.

2. That which satisfies must be firm and unchangeable; but of whom, or what, can this be said, but of God only? Ps. cii. 25—27. "With him there is no variableness nor shadow of turning."

3. The soul is immortal, and the good that satisfies it must be everlasting. At death we leave our present state; and exchange it for an eternal state; but God is from everlasting to everlasting, and so the only proper portion of his people, for both worlds. None in heaven, or upon earth, can be to them in the stead of God.

IV. The Christian renouncing all other good, what he may have in view, when he says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?"

1. Communion with God here, having access to him through his Son, by the help of his Spirit: sending his desires after him, and receiving supplies of light, life, love, &c. 1 John i. 3.

2. The future, full enjoyment of God above, which will be infinitely greater than any thing of God which the Christian can enjoy here; 1 John iii. 2; and this he is continually aspiring to.

"Whom have I in heaven but thee?" which, as to its import, includes such things as these :

1. Whom have I but thee, that I should choose and prefer before all the world ?

2. Whom have I in heaven or earth but thee, that I should so much delight in, be pleased with, and of whom my meditation should be so sweet ? Ps. xvi. 5—7.

3. Whom have I in either world but thee, that I should unfeignedly resign to, and consent to be governed by ? Ps. lxxiii. 23.

4. Whom have I in heaven or earth that I should love but thee, in comparison of thee, or any otherwise than in thee and for thee ?

5. Whom have I in heaven but thee, to whom I should pray, direct my homage and worship ?

6. Whom have I in heaven or earth but thee, to trust and hope in ? Thy name is the Lord Jehovah, in whom is everlasting kindness and strength.

Lastly. Whom have I in heaven but thee, that I most long to be with ? Phil. i. 23.

To be able to speak this language feelingly, clearly shows,

1. The change of soul that such have experienced in being born of God. It is the effect of a new nature.

2. The experience such have had of the insufficiency of all created good to satisfy without God. Ps. cxix. 96. Eccl. xi. 8.

3. The comfort and satisfaction the holy soul has found in God, more than all the world besides, determines to this. Ps. lxiii. 2.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE TO DWELL IN GOD'S HOUSE.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, &c.—Ps. xxvii. 4.

THESE words are expressive of the temper of a gracious soul, one born from heaven, and travelling thither.

In speaking from the text, we may consider,

1. What is meant by the house of God, in which the Christian desires to dwell ?

1. The house of God sometimes means any place where the presence of God is manifested. Gen. xxviii. 19.

2. Any house or building wherein God is worshipped ; the tabernacle first, and afterwards the temple, was frequently called the house of God. Ps. xlii. 4 ; cxxii. 1.

3. Under the gospel dispensation, the house of God, and a church, or worshipping assembly of his people, are all one. 1 Pet. ii. 5. There Christ has promised to be. Matt. xviii. 20.

4. The state of glory in heaven. It is sometimes represented as a country, a better country, Heb. xi. 14, 16 ; a kingdom, James ii. 5 ; a city. Heb. xi. 16 ; and our Lord speaks of it under the notion of a house. John xiv. 2. It is a country for its largeness and extent, and

for its pleasure, it is a paradise ; Luke xxiii. 43 ; a kingdom for its grandeur, a city for its order, and a house for the neatness and familiarity allowed to the blessed inhabitants. It is a house of God, in which all his people live, as children in the same family, members of the same society, and have a common dependence on the same Father, showing the greatest love to him and to each other. The apostle speaks of heaven in this view. 2 Cor. v. 1. The firmament, so thickly set and adorned with stars, is but the pavement of the outer court of this house of God ; and the glory of this intimates, that it is inconceivably bright and beautiful within. This is what the Psalmist ultimately aimed at : he not only wished to enjoy the means of grace here, but the state of glory above ; and to this he may be supposed to refer in Psalm xvii. 15.

II. Consider the nature of the Christian's desire, in relation to the house of God, together with the occasion of it.

1. It is real, not pretended only, or professed before men ; they can appeal to God for the truth of it.

2. Determinate and fixed. He speaks as having all the powers of the soul united, and running into it : it was the one thing that he desired, as if all other things were of little value in his estimation. See the language of the Psalmist, which nothing but the warmest feeling could help him to. Ps. xliii. 1, 2 ; lxiii. 1 ; lxxxiv. 2.

3. Constant and abiding ; not transient, and but for a little while ; but it still lives in the soul in which it is kindled, and, as a proof of it, he is resolved still to seek after it, to dwell in the house of the Lord.

4. It is influential upon practice. The soul that desires to dwell in the house of the Lord, will express it in prayer to him, and follow it with his own endeavour ; he will seek after it, and think no labour too much to attain to it.

This desire is occasioned,

1. By the heavenly principle with which he is blessed : what comes from God leads to him.

2. The difference there is between his state below, and that above, as to place. This earth is but the viler part of creation ; how much inferior to heaven ! As to inhabitants, here is a mixture of all sorts ; but above, all will be alike, and all like God. As to circumstances without ; here they are subject to the rage of the world, the temptations of Satan, and a thousand snares ; but above, the one shall be done away, and the other complete. As to their work, here they have constant need to pray and cry for what they want, to watch against what they fear, lament over what they feel ; but above, all ground of complaint shall be removed, and prayer turned into everlasting praise.

3. The foretastes they sometimes have of what is to be enjoyed above : this leads them earnestly to desire the fulness. Eph. i. 14.

III. The end at which he aims, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

The beauty of the Lord ; but none can fully understand this, till admitted within the veil. 1 Cor. ii. 9. In the house above, the face of God shall be unveiled, his beauty discovered, and the faculties of his people strengthened to bear it. The discovery of his perfections begun here, will be perfected above. This beauty the Christian desires,

1. As it is transforming. 2 Cor. iii. 18. 1 John iii. 2.

2. As most pleasing, to behold a reconciled face, to see the tokens of his love, to look into the soul, and behold his likeness, to be admitted to communion with him, and that for ever. Rev. vii. 15.

And to inquire in his temple.

1. Into the mysteries of providence.

2. Into the mysteries of redemption, concerning all of which they shall receive the most ample satisfaction. John xiii. 7. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

Improvement :

1. How astonishing is it, that God should have a temple with men !

2. How kind was the undertaking of Christ, to open a way to this !

3. How much to be lamented is it, that so few should desire to dwell in his house !

4. How great is the change in those who desire this above all other things !

5. How seriously should we examine how it is with us !

THE

ADVANTAGE OF HOPING AND WAITING FOR THE SALVATION OF GOD.

It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.—Lam. iii. 26.

THE goodness of God is a powerful argument to engage his people to seek him, and wait for him. So it is, as it is infinite ; as through his Son, it is open and ready to be communicated to those who otherwise could have no hope : as it is what his people have experienced, and given their testimony to. The goodness of God under such views, may well be his people's support, in seeking to him, waiting for him ; as he "never said unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye my face in vain." None of the servants of God shall be losers by him ; but every one of them shall be led to own, at last, that it is good to hope, and quietly wait for his salvation.

Consider,

I. What is included in the salvation here spoken of. In general, it includes the whole of that blessedness that Christ hath purchased, and which God for his sake hath promised. It is,

1. A salvation from every kind and degree of evil ; sin, temptations, the troubles of this world, and future, everlasting miseries. Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

2. The being put into the possession of all good, for which it is called a salvation, with eternal glory. 2 Tim. ii. 10. An inheritance incorruptible, &c. 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. Where every desire shall be filled up, every prayer answered, and all changed into the most exalted, everlasting praise and thanksgiving.

II. Why is it called the salvation of the Lord ?

1. It is a salvation worthy of him. Heb. xi. 16.

2. It is designed, prepared, and promised by him. Rev. ii. 10.

3. It is a salvation that will consist in the enjoyment of him. It may well be said, it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but what we are waiting for, is the salvation of God.

III. What is implied in hoping and patiently waiting for it?

1. Having the heart fixed by faith on the salvation of God as real, though out of sight. Heb. xi. 1. By this the people of God wait for his salvation, not as a mere probability, but as the greatest certainty.

2. A full persuasion that the salvation of God will come at last, though for a time deferred. Though I am in one world, and the happiness I expect in another, hope enters into that within the veil; and so proves an anchor to the soul, enabling the heirs of the kingdom to hold fast till they enter heaven. Heb. vi. 19.

3. Expecting the salvation of God in his time; depending upon his wisdom to choose the fittest season, and his faithfulness to remember us when that season comes.

4. Serious care to be found ready, whenever called to enter upon the salvation of God, which we have been waiting for.

IV. In what respects it may be said to be good thus to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.

1. It is good, as it redounds to God's glory; as it is a testimony of his power and grace.

2. As it may encourage others to look, and wait for this salvation.

3. As it will be comfortable to ourselves, disposing us to meet the will of God in a becoming manner, when our heavenly Father shall call, saying, "Come up hither;" to be ready to step forth and answer, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord: Blessed is that servant, who, when his Lord cometh, shall be found so doing."

CHRIST'S DEEP HUMILIATION, IN THE STATE OF THE DEAD.

And when Joseph had taken the body, &c.—Matt. xxvii. 59, 60.

IN the preceding account, we behold the most astonishing event that ever engaged the attention of mankind, the crucifixion of the Son of God. He is shamefully betrayed by one of his own disciples, denied by another, and forsaken of all, arraigned at the bar of Pilate, condemned, though innocent, and put to death. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, and one of our Lord's disciples, had courage sufficient to beg the dead body of our Lord for burial, of Pilate, who had condemned him; a requisition which it appears he readily granted. "And when Joseph had taken the body," &c.

Consider,

I. The deep humiliation of the Lord Jesus, from the time of his death to his resurrection: he continued in the state of the dead for a time, which was the lowest state of his humiliation, and the deepest abasement of the Son of God. For,

1. Death continued its power and dominion over him all that time.

Rom. vi. 9. He was kept fast bound as with cords in this state of captivity, bondage, and imprisonment. Acts ii. 24.

2. While in this state, he was cut off, as all the dead are, from the comforts of this life, and from all capacity of performing those holy duties and services to God and man, which is the privilege of living saints beyond the dead.

Although the souls of departed saints are employed in the praises of God, and other services in heaven, yet the whole man is not thus employed as when they were in this world; and hence, on this account, good men have sometimes pleaded with God to be spared from death for a time, as David, Hezekiah, and others. Isa. xxxviii. 3, 19.

3. Men took occasion therefrom to give him over as lost, as completely vanquished by death, beyond all hope of deliverance. His enemies, who said of him when alive, "he saved others, himself he cannot save," would say much more of him, while he continued in the state of the dead. Verses 42, 43. Yea, the faith of his disciples was almost extinguished by this circumstance. Luke xxiv. 20, 21.

4. His soul entered into heaven, as the soul of a good man; so that when he entered paradise, when he died, it was only with one half of his humanity; Luke xxiii. 43; and in that separate state he waited, for the re-union of his soul with his body, thereby acknowledging the dominion of death over him.

5. His body was laid in the grave: that body which was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, inhabited by the Godhead, and continued personally united to the Divine nature in the person of the eternal Son, was laid in the dark and silent grave. He was buried at the expense of others, buried privately, in a hurry, without any state or pomp, buried in Joseph's new tomb: he had not where to lay his head while living, nor a tomb of his own to lay his body in when dead. Matt. viii. 20.

6. His body was in the power of his enemies all the while. His body was pierced by the spear of a Roman soldier: it could not be buried till leave was granted by a pagan judge. Deep humiliation! that the remains of a God, in the nature of man, should be asked for, in order to be buried! His tomb, with his body, was committed, by the Roman governor, to the custody of the chief priests until the third day; they sealed the stone at the door, and placed a guard of Roman soldiers to watch it. Matt. xxvii. 62—66.

II. Why our Lord continued in the state of the dead, and under the power of it, for a time.

1. That the types and prophecies relative thereto might have their accomplishment. Ps. xxii. 15. Isa. liii. 9. Matt. xii. 40.

2. To ascertain the reality of his death and resurrection from the dead. His enemies neither could, nor can pretend, that he was not really dead, and that his resurrection was but a fiction: Pilate was assured of his death, before he gave liberty for his body to be buried. The spear pierced him to the heart, which would have been certain present death, if he had not been dead before. And his body, while in the tomb, was under the keeping of his enemies; from all which it is certain, that both his death and resurrection were real.

3. That he might fully satisfy the demands of the law and justice of

God for our sins. The penal sentence of the law, which justice was engaged to execute upon the sinner, is in Gen. iii. 19. Our blessed Surety suffered this sentence for us, by descending in our stead to the dust of death, and laying his head in the grave.

4. That he might conquer death and the grave in their own territories. Hos. xiii. 14. He seized the dreadful dragon in its den; he "swallowed up death in victory:" and, before he would part with death and the grave, he destroyed their cursed nature: and abolished their enmity to his people, engaging them for ever to be the believer's friend; for, saith the apostle, "If you are Christ's, death is yours." 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23. Your privilege, your gain.

Improvement:

1. Are you crying out with tears, "iniquities prevail against me?" Remember, that Christ died for your sins, and continued under the power of death for a time, to destroy the power and being of sin.

2. Are you mourning for the death of dear and pious relations? Here is comfort, Jesus died, and was buried; and shall we think it hard to follow our dear relations to the grave, and leave them there, until the Lord come to awaken them, and raise them up at the last day to everlasting life?

3. Are you afraid of death and the grave? The Captain of your salvation has gone before you, through these black regions of death and the grave. By submitting to death, he hath overcome and abolished every thing that is evil in death. And he will be with you in death, that you may sing with holy David. Ps. xxiii. 4. And he will say to you, as he did to Jacob at Beersheba, in his way unto Egypt, "Fear not," &c. Gen. xlv. 3, 4.

CHRIST'S JOY

IN THE PROSPECT OF HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth, &c.—Ps. xvi. 9, 10.

THESE verses, with the eighth, are quoted by the apostle Peter, Acts ii. 25—32, and applied by him to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Paul also applies the words in the same sense. Acts xiii. 35—37. From which it evidently appears, that the text is a prediction of the resurrection, and subsequent glory of Christ.

In discoursing from these words we shall,

I. Premise a few observations, which will tend to give us a clearer view of the affections ascribed to the Redeemer, in prospect of his death, and entering into the state of the dead.

1. That the last sufferings of Christ were the most bitter that ever were tasted from the beginning, or ever shall, to the end of the world: they were more than all the sufferings of the martyrs, or all men in the world put together; seeing that God laid on him the sins of the whole world. 1 John ii. 2. He suffered all that men and devils, in their utmost rage and fury, could inflict, a shameful, painful, and a cursed death; his Father hid his face, and withdrew all sensible comforts from him. Matt.

xxvii. 46. The punishment of our sins was laid upon him, the wrath of God due to us for our sins. Isa. liii. 10.

2. Jesus knew perfectly, before it came to pass, all that he was to suffer: many of his sufferings were foretold by the prophets; and he frequently spake of them to his disciples. John xviii. 4.

3. Jesus Christ, as an innocent, holy, and wise man, was suitably affected with such grievous sufferings, when they came upon him: his "soul was troubled; he was sore amazed, and very heavy, and was exceeding sorrowful even unto death;" was in agony, and sweat "great drops of blood;" and prayed that the "bitter cup might pass from him;" and laments his Father's absence. Matt. xxvii. 46.

4. In the midst of his sufferings he had such comforts, as effectually supported him under all his sorrow and sufferings; these comforts made him enter upon the work cheerfully, and go through it with submission and satisfaction. This leads us to consider,

II. The account of these as expressed in the text.

1. His heart was glad. He rejoiced for an entire eternity in the prospect of redeeming mankind. Prov. viii. 31. The same was prophesied of him. Ps. xl. 8. It was his meat and drink to do it. John iv. 34. He could not endure any thing that tended to obstruct him in it. Matt. xvi. 23. He expressed earnest desire and longings after his sufferings and death. Luke xii. 50. When his enemies advanced, he went foremost to meet them. In the greatness of his agony, he indeed complains to his Father; but he presently submits, "not as I will, but as thou wilt." He poured out his soul freely, willingly. Isa. liii. 12. He laid down his life, no one took it from him. John x. 18.

2. His glory rejoiced; that is, his tongue, as the apostle Peter explains it. Acts ii. 26. The joy of his heart vented itself by his tongue, in songs of praise to God, and in triumphant shouts as a conqueror. He "rejoiced in spirit," and expresses this joy in thanksgiving to his Father, Luke x. 21. In manifesting his perfections. John xvii. 6. He gave thanks at the institution of the supper. Matt. xxvi. 26, 27. When Judas was gone to betray him, his tongue breaks out in a triumph of joy. John xiii. 31, 32. And he made a hymn of praise, a preface to his agony and bloody sweat. Matt. xxvi. 30. And having fully satisfied Divine justice, and the shines of his Father's countenance returning, he, with the voice of victory and triumph, cried, "It is finished," &c. John xix. 30.

3. His flesh was to rest in hope; that is, his whole manhood, both soul and body, shall rest in hope, shall dwell in a tabernacle confidently; so it is in the original; and is expressive of that calm serenity of mind which he felt through life, being confident that his sufferings would come to a happy issue. Shall rest in hope, under his greatest agonies and last sufferings, whether from God or man; he should still be resigned and satisfied, patient and calm. Isa. liii. 7; 1. 5, 6. Shall rest in hope; his soul going to paradise, was to wait there for its re-union with the body. Shall rest in hope; that is, his pained, wearied, and tortured body lie down in the grave, as in a bed of rest, there to remain for a short time in hope of a speedy resurrection.

III. The ground of his comfort and triumphant joy, in the prospect of his sufferings and death.

It was the promises of God to him, and his unshaken faith in those promises.

1. He was promised assistance and strength to carry him successfully through all, verses 8, 9. Also Isa. xlii. 5—7. And Jesus expresses himself on this subject in the sublimest strains. Isa. l. 7—9.

2. He was promised the countenance of Jehovah, and he gave them the tokens of it in his lowest estate : he promised that he would not leave his soul in hell ; that is, the hypostatical union should be continued, even while he was in the state of the dead : and that he would give him the singular privilege to preserve his body from the least taint of corruption while in the grave. “Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

3. A speedy and glorious resurrection ; “Thou wilt show me the path of life ; therefore my heart is glad,” &c. And when he foretold to his disciples his death, he comforted them by telling them that he would rise again.

4. The joy and gladness he would have in heaven, in the enjoyment of the promised glory there. Ps. xvi. 11. Somewhat differently expressed by the apostle. Acts ii. 28. Where “he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.” Isa. liii. 10, 11.

5. His unshaken faith in these promises ; he was persuaded his Father’s presence would be with him, that he would raise him from the dead the third day, give him the promised glory in heaven ; that he should see his seed. By this faith he looked through all those black and dismal clouds which surrounded him, to “the joy set before him.” This faith continued under the sense of his Father’s displeasure, and while he felt the outward and inward force of his frowns ; and for this faith, the chief priests, &c. mocked him upon the cross. Matt. xxvii. 41.

Improvement :

1. Let us, from what has been said, behold the amazing love of Jesus Christ to us, and endeavour to return him our best affections. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. 1 John iv. 19.

2. Let us imitate the affections of Jesus, in dying for us, when we partake of the Lord’s Supper. Let us do it with gladness of heart, with triumphant praises of the Redeemer and his love, with a lively expectation of receiving all the blessings which he hath purchased for us by his death, and in the exercise of a lively faith, that we may spiritually eat his flesh and drink his blood ; and so prove his flesh to be meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed, that we may have eternal life. John vi. 54—56.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead, according to my gospel.—2 Tim. ii. 8.

THE remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is a duty at all times, and is of the greatest use and benefit in the Christian life. This the holy apostle sufficiently sheweth, by pressing it upon Timothy, as of

great influence to make him steadfast and constant in the duties both of a minister and a Christian, notwithstanding the greatest sufferings. For having in the preceding verses exhorted him to this constancy, that he might urge and enable him to it, he saith in the text, "Remember," &c.

In speaking upon this subject, I shall,

I. Premise some things for the better understanding it.

1. That the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was only in his human nature in which he died; and as his body and soul continued as much personally united to his Divine nature in his death, as it was before; his resurrection consisted in the re-union of his soul with his body; and of consequence, his reviving and rising out of the grave, to an eternal and happy life, in his human nature.

2. That his resurrection is a fact sufficiently attested and supported by the most unquestionable evidence. See Acts xiii. 30, 31; and i. 3. And that those were a great number of witnesses, who knew him, saw him frequently, and conversed with him after his resurrection, is abundantly manifest from New Testament history, a summary of which the Apostle Paul gives. 1 Cor. xv. 4—8. And as this fact was an accomplishment of the Old Testament prophecies, and of his own frequent predictions, that he was to rise again; so the witnesses of it to the world were of such a character, and were in such circumstances, as they neither could be deceived themselves, nor would they deceive the world to whom they were sent as witnesses of it.

II. Show what it is concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ we should remember.

1. We should remember who he is who rose again from the dead. That he is the Son of God; and according to the flesh, the seed and offspring of David. Gal. iv. 4. Who declared to the world for three years and a half that he was the Son of God, the King of Israel, and the Christ who was to come into the world, according to promises and predictions from the fall of Adam; which he proved by signs and wonders, and witnessed by his death. We should remember, that he was unjustly put to death by Pilate, at the instigation of the Jews, for his declaring himself to be the Son of God, the Messiah that was to come; and that was he who died to satisfy Divine justice for our sins. All this the apostles insisted much upon in all their sermons; see the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 10th, and 13th chapters of the Acts of the Apostles.

2. By whom he was raised from the dead. It was by the power of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; whose power is one and the same; and, therefore, his resurrection is the indivisible work of the blessed Trinity, and common to the three persons. It is, indeed, frequently ascribed, in a peculiar manner, to the Father, because he, in the economy of our redemption, sustained the person of a Judge, to whom satisfaction was made; and, as the delivering of Christ to death belonged to him, on the same account it belonged to him as Judge, by his warrant and authority, to deliver Christ from prison and judgment, by his resurrection from the dead. He rose, also, by his own power. John x. 18.

3. The manner and properties of Christ's resurrection. That he rose with the same body wherein he died, and which was laid in the grave,

retaining all its essential properties ; that he rose early in the morning of the first day of the week, and upon the third day from his death, according to the scripture, types, and prophecies, and his own predictions of it : he rose no sooner, that it might be evident he was really dead ; and no later, because the Holy One of God was not to see corruption ; that he rose with awful majesty ; Matt. xxviii. 2—4 ; that he rose as a public person ; 1 Cor. xv. 22, 23 ; that his resurrection was accompanied with that of many of the saints. Matt. xxvii. 52, 53.

4. The end of Christ's resurrection. That God might be glorified, as the supreme end ; that the scriptures might be fulfilled ; that a foundation might be laid for the faith and hope of sinners in God by him. 1 Pet. i. 21. That he might enter into that glory promised to him as Mediator, as the reward of his obedience unto the death. Rom. xiv. 9. That he might execute his offices in an exalted state, in order to the application of his purchased redemption to mankind ; hence we are saved by his life, as well as reconciled to God by his death. Rom. v. 10.

5. The fruits of his resurrection, and the advantages we derive therefrom. We are thereby assured, that he is that which he declared himself to be. Rom. i. 4. That justice is fully satisfied for our sins, and eternal redemption obtained for us by his sufferings and death. Our justification is a fruit of his resurrection. Rom. iv. 25. His death, indeed, is the meritorious cause of our justification ; but his death would have been of no efficacy for this, if he had not risen again. In his resurrection he was justified as our surety, and we virtually in him : his resurrection is declarative of this. Upon this ground the apostle declares the believer's exemption from condemnation. Rom. viii. 34. Our regeneration and life of sanctification, from its commencement to its completion, is the fruit of his resurrection. Rom. vi. 3—5, &c. Our resurrection to everlasting life ; his resurrection being the pledge, assurance, argument, and certain cause of ours. See 1 Cor. xv. 20, 21. Eternal salvation, and the hope of it, is another fruit of his resurrection. 1 Pet. i. 1, 3, 4.

III. How we should remember Christ's resurrection, so as to feel the saving influence of it upon our own hearts ; and in order thereto we must,

1. Have some distinct knowledge of the history of Jesus Christ ; for, without this, the remembrance of it can be of little avail.

2. The doctrine of his resurrection must be firmly believed by us. Rom. x. 8, 9.

3. We must remember it with application of it to ourselves. Rom. vi. 6—9.

4. With praise and thanksgiving. 1 Pet. i. 3.

5. Labour by earnest prayers to God, by faith in Christ's resurrection, by a diligent use of outward means, to experience and feel the power of Christ's resurrection, and that divine power exerted, which raised him from the dead, upon our own souls, as did Paul. Phil. iii. 8, 10. And he prays for the Ephesians, that they might know, &c. Eph. i. 16—20. This feeling of the power of Christ's resurrection, will be an effectual mean to help you to a right remembrance of it. Godly and spiritual conversation is also an excellent mean for this ; when the two disciples

were going to Emmaus, and were discoursing of Christ, he joined himself to them, discourses with them about his resurrection, and makes them feel its influence warming their hearts. Above, all keep communion with the Holy Spirit: employ him, address him, depend and wait upon him, to enable you to remember, in a right manner, Christ's resurrection from the dead; for it is his office to bring all things concerning Jesus Christ to our remembrance.

Improvement:

1. Let the wicked tremble on the account of their unbelief; he who arose from the dead in dreadful majesty, the keepers of his sepulchre, becoming as dead men, shall ere long judge them for their infidelity. Acts xvii. 30, 31.

2. Let the righteous rejoice. Christ lives to die no more, and because he lives, we shall live, John xiv. 19, to his glory in this world, and with him in heaven to all eternity. Rom. xiv. 7—9.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST,

THE HAPPINESS OF THE SAINTS.

Thou wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fulness of joy, &c.
Psalm xvi. 11.

THESE words originally belong to Christ, being applied by David to him, in the spirit of prophecy, as will evidently appear from the connexion in which they stand. They are also applicable to the real Christian, and are expressive of the happiness and joy he expects in a future state. Joy is the soul's rest and satisfaction in the enjoyment of a suitable good. Such as the good and enjoyment are, such will be the joy. The most perfect enjoyment of the most perfect good, must, therefore, cause the most perfect joy. Such is the joy of the blessed in heaven. It consists in being in Christ's immediate presence, and partaking of that fulness of joy, and those pleasures which are at his right hand for evermore,

Consider,

1. The character of those who shall be thus blessed: they are such as, 1. Repent of their sins, and are converted: who cease to do evil and learn to do well. Upon these the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. Acts iii. 19.

2. Believe in Christ, with a divine, practical, purifying faith. 1 John iii. 3.

3. Upright in their profession, and performance of commanded duties, both to God and man. Ps. cxl. 13.

4. His servants, who follow him as their Lord and Master, and his imitable life as their copy and pattern. John xii. 26.

5. 'To conclude this head, if any inquire, as the Psalmist did, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?" I answer as he did, "He that hath clean hands," &c. Ps. xxiv. 3, 4.

II. Wherein their blessedness consists: and according to the text, it

is occasioned by being in the presence of God : and by that fulness of joy and pleasure which are at his right hand.

1. The presence of God here spoken of, is the presence of his glory, the most conspicuous lustre of his excellences, or his perfections shining in the highest excellence of their brightness. Jude, verse 24.

2. The presence of his face, as it is in the original text : "In thy face, or by being before thy face, is fulness of joy." The presence of his glory, which is hidden here, will be unveiled in heaven, and presented openly to view, without veil or shadow. 1 Pet. iv. 13. For we shall see him face to face, &c. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

3. His immediate presence ; no longer manifested through obscuring mediums : here we have his presence in creatures, in providences, and in ordinances ; but in heaven we shall enjoy him immediately, and without the intervention of means. Rev. xxi. 22, 23 ; xxii. 5.

4. His countenancing presence : so the apostle explains the text. Acts ii. 28. It is his presence as a pleased friend, father, and husband. To these he gives the presence of his pleased face, without a frown, and the light of his countenance without an intervening cloud. As his anger kindleth hell, so his favour, the light and smiles of his countenance, make heaven. See Rev. xxi. 3, compared with Zeph. iii. 17.

5. His fixed and abiding presence : we shall be for ever with him, and he shall dwell among us. Rev. vii. 17.

6. His influxive and efficacious presence : a glimpse of it made the face of Moses shine. As it is reflected in the glass of the gospel ; it changeth them that behold it into the same image from glory to glory : much more will it change you, who shall stand before his face in heaven, into the most perfect likeness of him in holiness and happiness your natures are capable of. 1 John iii. 2.

Their happiness is also occasioned by those joys and pleasures which are at God's right hand. Heaven is a situation of joy and pleasure, very different from our present situation, which is a state of tribulation and distress. John xvi. 33. The joy and pleasures of the heavenly world are,

1. Spiritual and heavenly. Not carnal or earthly. Our bodies shall be spiritual, so far as not to need any of these supports and refreshments they do now. There will be no need of sleep, of meat and drink, of marrying and giving in marriage ; but we shall be as the angels of God in heaven. Mark xii. 25. 1 Cor. vi. 13. The more noble senses of seeing and hearing, the pleasure of which is mixed with reason, shall subsist, be spiritualized, and eternally satisfied with glorified objects, the chief of which shall be the glorified body of the Son of God. It is the joy of the Lord the saints enter into, the same for kind, though not for degree.

2. Pure, without mixture. Here there is a mixture of good and evil. Heaven and hell are the extremes. Hell is a place of animated torment, heaven of unmixed joy : no sin there : no temptation or occasion of sinning : no serpent hissing in that paradise : all sorrow and cause of sorrow shall be done away. Rev. vii. 16 ; xxi. 4.

3. A multitude without number. There is not only a removal of every evil, but the presence and enjoyment of every good. The blessedness of heaven is resembled by every real good known to us here,

all the glory and honour of the kings of the earth shall be there. Rev. xxi. 24—26. God, who is an infinite and universal good, will feast his saints with fresh discoveries and communications of delight and wonder. Isa. lx. 19.

4. Full, without any want. There every one shall enjoy a whole heaven, with all the felicities of it, and be blessed in every part in soul and body; all our wants shall be supplied, and our desires satisfied. Ps. xvii. 15.

5. Constant, without diminution or interruption. Here our best enjoyments are often changeable and interrupted; but the joys of heaven shall never fade away. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. God, who is the source of their happiness, remains unchangeably the same. The saints are fixed in his presence, and their happiness shall not be diminished on account of their number; as in nature, every man hath a sun to himself, the same as if there were but one man in the world. Nor will it be diminished on account of the length of the enjoyment; for the Divine presence is an eternal spring of pleasure. Ps. xxxvi. 9.

6. Perpetual. They are pleasures for evermore; all the felicities of heaven are everlasting; everlasting consolation, everlasting joy, everlasting habitations, everlasting life. It is this that maketh heaven to be heaven indeed; all its pleasures would be imperfect without it. It is an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Improvement :

1. Hence see the folly and madness of those who seek their portion in this life; in carnal and sensual gratifications; dreadful will be their state at last. Ps. xcvi. 3. Matt. xxv. 41.

2. Let such glorious views and expectations comfort the heirs of glory in the midst of all their tribulations. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

3. Let it excite all such to diligence and activity in the ways of God. This is the very use the apostle makes of this doctrine. 1 Cor. xv. 58. Heb. ii. 1, 2.

CHRIST'S GLORIOUS APPEARING AT THE END OF THE WORLD.

And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.—Matt. xxiv. 30.

THIS chapter containeth a discourse of our Lord to his disciples, as he sat with them upon the Mount of Olives, in answer to a twofold question they put to him, verse 3, when the destruction of the temple and city of Jerusalem should be? and what were the signs of his coming, and of the end of the world?

Jesus Christ designs himself in the text, the Son of Man, and at several other times when he speaks of his coming to judgment, because he will come and judge the world visibly in his human nature, so as he may be seen and heard of all the world. "They shall see the Son of Man," &c. Consider,

I. What that glory is in which the Lord Jesus Christ will appear at the end of the world.

1. In his own glory, as Mediator, which he entered into when he ascended; Luke xxiv. 26; as the reward of his sufferings and death. Eph. i. 20—23. In his own glory as Judge of all, unto whom they must bow, and from whom they must receive their final doom. Phil. ii. 8, 9. His blessed soul shall be filled with a joy beyond measure; and his blessed body will be brighter, in shining glory, than ten thousand thousand suns. This bright glory now fills heaven. Rev. xxi. 23. When he comes, it will fill this visible world, and make the sun and moon disappear.

2. In the glory of his Father; that is, in the glory of the Godhead, as he is equal with God; his Father and he are one; John x. 30; and so their glory is one. This glory was veiled in his humiliation, by his human nature; but in his exaltation, it was again manifested, and broke forth into a brightness and splendour becoming God. This was what he prayed for. John xvii. 5. At his second appearing, there will be the appearance of the great God. Tit. ii. 13. He will then shine in the glory of his omniscience. 1 Cor. iv. 5. Of his truth. Matt. xxiv. 35. Of his justice. Ps. xcvi. 13. Of his matchless mercy, love, goodness, and grace. Rom. ix. 23. Of his power, so says the text, which will gloriously be manifested in raising the dead, gathering all into one place, making every knee bow before his awful tribunal, executing the sentence he will pronounce, changing heaven and earth, and in making all things new; and in this last-mentioned, he will manifest the glory of his own eternity, for while he shall change all things, he himself shall remain the same unchangeable God. Ps. cii. 25—27.

3. In the glory of all the mighty angels. Matt. xxv. 31. The whole court of heaven shall attend upon the Judge of the world, that they may be present with him at this great act. There is an innumerable company of angels. Heb. xii. 22. Ten thousand times ten thousand. Dan. vii. 10. They will come with him to minister to him. Matt. xxiv. 31; see also Matt. xiii. 40, 41. You read, Rev. xviii. 1, of the earth being lightened with one angel coming down from heaven; but what glory shall attend the appearance of all the mighty angels, surrounding the great Judge, descending visibly from heaven!

II. Some things which evidence the greatness of this glory in which Jesus Christ will come.

1. It appears from what has been already said, it is not the glory of all the mighty angels: we could not endure the glory of one of them in this mortal state, it would confound all mankind met together. What must be their glory when united? It is his own glory as Mediator, the reward of his sufferings as low as hell, and which his human nature hath from the personal union, the fulness of the Godhead dwelling therein, and so a glory which no mere creature is capable of. It is the essential glory of the great God, and this is incomprehensible, incomparable, and infinite. Heb. i. 3.

2. You may form some idea of it, from some preceding appearances upon lesser occasions. How great was the glory he appeared in when he gave the law upon Mount Sinai! Ex. xix. 16—18. If his glory at the giving of the law was so great, what will it be, when he comes to call men to an account for the keeping of it? When Isaiah received his

commission from him, Isa. vi. 1—4, it confounded him, and made him cry out, "Woe is me," &c. Ver. 5. When he was transfigured. Matt. xvii. 2. When he appeared to Paul on his way to Damascus. Acts. xxvi. 13.

3. The antecedent and immediate forerunners of the coming and appearance of Jesus Christ, discover something of the greatness of his glory at his second coming, all of which are very awful and dreadful. There will be a dreadful commotion in this lower world. Matt. xxiv. 29. Luke xxi. 25, 26. Some glorious appearance, which is called the sign of the Son of Man in our text, which, perhaps, will be some beams of majesty and glory, that will pass through the heavens like lightning. Matt. xxiv. 27. A great shout, 1 Thess. iv. 16, some say of all the holy angels, or the voice of Christ himself. Heb. xii. 26. John v. 28. The voice of the archangel, which, perhaps, will be heard above all the rest, saying, "Behold," &c. Matt. xxv. 6. The trump of God, 1 Thess. iv. 16, that is, a mighty trumpet, as the Hebrews call things of unusual greatness, things of God; as great trees, trees of God; great mountains, mountains of God: by it the dead will be summoned from their graves, 1 Cor. xv. 52, and all collected. Matt. xxiv. 31. And oh! this will be a tremendous blast to the ungodly. Flaming fire. Ps. l. 3, 4. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. The glory of the throne on which he will sit. Matt. xxv. 31. It is said to be high and lifted up. Isa. vi. 1. See Dan. vii. 9, 10. Rev. xx. 11. All these circumstances tend to show the greatness of his glory, when he shall come at the end of the world.

III. Why the Lord Jesus will come the second time in so great glory.

1. As a recompense to him for his abasement. He came at first in obedience to his Father, humble, lowly, despised, spit upon, and crucified. To make him amends for this, and to wipe off the scandal and offence of it, he shall come in power and great glory. This was foretold of him. Ps. cx. 7; see also Phil. ii. 6—10.

2. He will come in great glory, to beget a great reverence and awe in all who are to be judged by him. This will make all knees bow before him, and his enemies lick the dust. To this purpose the Psalmist speaketh prophetically. Ps. lxxii. 9.

3. That all the world may see it; and his people thereby be made glad with exceeding joy; 1 Pet. iv. 13; and that his enemies may see what they have lost, by being shut out from the sight and enjoyment of this glory.

4. That he may carry home his saints as his bride, with greater state and solemnity, unto his Father's house, where he hath prepared mansions for them. He will not send, but come himself, in all his glory, as a royal bridegroom cometh, with all the flower of his court, to bring home his espoused wife. John xiv. 3. Then the voice of the multitude will be heard, as in Rev. xix. 6, 7.

Improvement:

1. If Christ will come in such glory, how terrible will his coming be to infidels who count him an impostor! To mere nominal Christians, who are dead while they live. 2 Thess. i. 7—9. To those who are ashamed of him and his words. Mark viii. 38. To those who would never submit themselves to his laws in their lives and conversation, but

continued in rebellion against him. Jude, verses 14, 15. To those who have not employed their talents of time, gifts, health, and power, given them for the service and glory of God; but have laid out all on their own selfish ends, and the gratification of their sensual desires. Mat. xxv. 30, 31.

2. How consolatory is the consideration of the second glorious appearing of Jesus Christ to the real Christian! He who comes in this great glory, is he who hath loved us. Every thing will be removed from such that would make them afraid of this glorious appearance. Yea, at his appearance, such shall appear with him in glory. Col. iii. 4. The voice of the archangel shall be, to such, the sweetest melody; for such will be his language, "Awake, sing, ye that dwell in the dust; rise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee for ever and ever."

THE NEGATIVE HAPPINESS OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

And there shall be no more curse.—Rev. xxii. 3.

THIS, and the two following verses, conclude a magnificent description of that happiness which remaineth for the people of God in the heavenly world, begun in the 10th verse of the preceding chapter. Some interpreters apply it to a state of the church before the end of time; but this is neither suitable to the grandeur of the expression, nor to the evident scope of this vision, which is to describe the happy condition of those written in the "Lamb's book of life." There can be no perfect blessedness, without a full removal of all evil, and possession of all good; and this is what the words of the text assure us the saints shall enjoy in heaven: there shall be no more curse.

Consider,

I. Who the persons are who shall be thus highly favoured: the particulars of their characters are,

1. They have been called by the word, and convinced by the Spirit, of sin, of unbelief; John xvi. 9; have been deeply affected on the account of it, and alarmed for the consequences. Acts xvi. 30.

2. Have received Christ as offered in the gospel, by a lively faith, through which their freedom from the curse is begun in this life. John v. 24. Gal. iii. 13.

3. They love Christ, and consequently are delivered from the dreadful anathema denounced against those who do not love him. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

4. It is their care and endeavour, as a fruit of this love to Christ, to give sincere, universal, and constant obedience to his commandments. Rev. xxii. 14.

5. They consider it as heaven to be where God and his Christ are, to serve him, and to enjoy him for ever. Phil. i. 23.

6. They are careful to maintain good works, particularly works of charity, towards the members of Jesus Christ. The question will not

be at last, have you prophesied in my name? heard me preach in your streets? eaten and drank in my presence? but, have you, according to your ability, clothed my people who were naked? &c. If you are such, you belong to those who shall be delivered from all curse for ever. *Matt. xxv. 34—41.*

II. The happiness of those who shall be thus highly favoured, according to the language of the text: "There shall be no more curse."

1. There will be no more sin in such, or ever done by them, to occasion any curse: they are the just made perfect. *Heb. xii. 23.* No sin can enter the New Jerusalem. *Rev. xxi. 2, 27.* It will be a glorious church, without wrinkle. *Eph. v. 27. Ps. lxxviii. 13.*

2. There will be no more wrath in God, to inflict any curse: once he was angry with them on account of sin; *Isa. xii. 1. Ps. xxxviii. 3;* but it shall not be so any more. *Ezek. xvi. 42.*

3. There will be no more sentence passed against them including a curse. Once they were subject to that tremendous sentence; *Gal. iii. 10;* but never shall any more. *John v. 24.*

4. "There shall be no more curse," includes security against every degree of separation from God, and the communion of the church above. *Rev. iii. 12.* Here we sometimes complain with *Job;* *xxiii. 8, 9;* but there we shall have his presence for ever. *Rev. xxi. 3.* And this is what our blessed Saviour desired for us of the Father. *John xvii. 21—23.*

5. "There shall be no more curse," includes an exemption from all the evils of affliction and sufferings, which are included in the curse of the law, and which real Christians so frequently endure here. *Isa. xxxv. 10.* In that happy world there will be no doubt or fear; no accusations of conscience; no sickness or disease; no hunger, thirst, nakedness, want; *Rev. vii. 16, 17;* no toil in religious duties, or labouring for the meat that perishes; *Rev. xiv. 13. Isa. xiv. 3;* no David lamenting over his Absalom; *2 Sam. xviii. 33;* no minister bewailing on account of "many who have sinned," the little good effect of his ministry; but that scripture shall be fully accomplished. *Rev. xxi. 4.*

Lastly. There shall be no person who is a curse, or is accursed, among the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem. Here the tares are mixed with the wheat; but there they shall be separated for ever. *Rev. xxi. 27.* In this world you may remove from church to church, from family to family, from country to country; you may remove from one end of the world to another, to avoid the society of the wicked; but the apostle tells us that we cannot, unless we go out of the world. *1 Cor. v. 10.* In the next world, there will be a thorough separation, according to our Lord's words in the double parable of the sower and the net. *Matt. xiii. 26, 47.*

III. Whence it is, that the persons already described are thus blessed.

1. The love of God the Father is the original cause of their blessedness. *2 Tim. i. 9, 10.* He has chosen them in Christ. *Eph. i. 3—12.* And they are the blessed of the Father. *Matt. xxv. 34.*

2. The death of Christ is the meritorious cause of their blessedness. *Gal. iii. 13.*

3. The Holy Ghost, with his gracious influences, is the efficient cause. Gal. iii. 13, 14. 2 Cor. v. 5. Ps. cxliii. 10.

4. The blessed Jesus will, at the last day, publicly and solemnly justify all such; as the Judge of all, adjudge them to eternal blessedness in heaven, and put them into the actual and full possession of it. Jude, ver. 24.

Lastly. That there shall be no more curse in heaven to such, is because "the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it for ever." This is the reason given in this verse for their blessedness.

Improvement :

1. How pleasing are the prospects of the real Christian, as to a future state ! here his felicity is only begun, there it shall be consummated. Matt. xxv. 34.

2. How dreadful shall be the future state of the finally impenitent ! for ever shut out of heaven, from the society of God, of Christ, of the Holy Ghost ; of holy angels ; and the wisest, the holiest, the best of men that ever lived : to feel the tremendous effects of the curse, of the law, and the wrath of God, for ever. Ps. ix. 17. Matt. xxv. 41.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

And his servants shall serve him.—Rev. xxii. 3.

CHRISTIANS frequently complain that all the services they do for their Lord are but little, imperfect, and hardly deserving the name of service : against this, there is a threefold ground of consolation ; that the satisfaction of Christ is the only and sufficient mean for the acceptance of our persons and services with God, and obtaining salvation with eternal glory ; that their sincere endeavours to serve the Lord are accepted, according to the covenant of grace, as evangelical perfection ; and also that the day is near, when their services shall be of the most exalted nature : then, indeed, his servants shall serve him.

Consider,

I. The character of God's servants here, who shall serve him afterwards in heaven.

1. This is not the character of any man by nature : all are naturally enemies to God, Col. i. 21 ; the servants of sin, Rom. vi. 17.

2. They are such as have mourned on account of their enmity and sin, Matt. v. 4 ; having returned to God with weeping, mourning and lamentation, &c. Joel ii. 12.

3. They have felt the efficacy of the blood of Christ, through faith, justifying and cleansing from sin. Rev. vii. 14, 15.

4. They have renounced all other lords and masters. Rom. vi. 17, 18. Have renounced their idols. Hos. xiv. 8. Calling God their Lord. Ps. xvi. 2. Have joined themselves to him, to serve him, Isa. lvi. 6 ; and can say with Paul, "The love of Christ constraineth us," &c. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

5. They have devoted themselves to the fear of the Lord, not a slavish, but a filial fear of him : they have an habitual reverent awe of his Divine Majesty, and study in all things to please him. Ps. cxix. 38. Neh. i. 11.

6. They have humbling views of their own character and services : 1 Tim. i. 15. Luke xvii. 10 ; and are of the circumcision, which " worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." Phil. iii. 3.

II. The service in which such shall be employed in the heavenly state.

In our present circumstances we can know but little of it. 1 John iii. 2. But from what is revealed to us in the holy scriptures, we may observe, that, as to the nature of the heavenly service, it is,

1. A service which does not imply a state of trial and probation. Preaching and hearing, &c. will then cease, as having attained their end. Rev. xxi. 22. Faith and hope shall be lost in vision and fruition. 1 Cor. xiii. 8—13. Our prayers shall be ended, having no more wants, having all things immediately in God and the Lamb. Every relative duty shall cease. Eph. vi. 5, 9. Luke xx. 35, 36. In one word, no service shall be required in heaven that implies imperfection. 1 Cor. xiii. 10.

2. It implies all those duties which the relations between God and the saints require, as their Creator and Redeemer. Rev. xiv. 4. James i. 18. This will have its full accomplishment in heaven. Time would fail to instance every particular. Love will be exercised in an exalted degree : fear also, an awful and reverent respect of the Divine Majesty. Ps. lxxxix. 7.

3. It will be such as the angels of God are employed in. They are employed in immediate acts of adoration and worship ; Rev. v. 11, 12 ; vii. 9—12 ; where saints and angels worship and adore together : and they make but one congregation, " an innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and church of the first-born." They are farther employed to execute his will and pleasure upon earth. Heb. i. 14. The scriptures intimate that the saints shall be so employed. Moses and Elias were so employed at our Lord's transfiguration on the mount. And the angel sent to John calls himself John's " fellow-servant, and one of his brethren ;" Rev. xix. 10 ; which must have been one of the departed prophets or apostles.

4. It will be a service of special and immediate attendance. Here we serve him in the vineyard ; but there it will be in the palace of the great King, in his presence-chamber. Luke xxi. 36. The words of Sheba's queen to Solomon, shall be strictly applicable to the redeemed in heaven. 1 Kings x. 8.

5. It will be the service of rulers and governors. Matt. xxv. 20—23. They shall tread down Satan and all their enemies ; Ps. xxi. 9 ; and those who suffer with Christ shall reign with him in heaven. 2 Tim. ii. 12.

6. It is a sabbath-service ; for there remaineth " a rest for the people of God : " in the original, a sabbatism, or sabbath-keeping. Heb. iv. 9. Not a rest in idleness, but in the most exalted acts of holy worship.

7. It will also consist in the performance of all the duties of love to the saints. There we shall know each other. Ministers shall know those who are the fruit of their labours, as their " crown and joy in hea-

ven." 1 Thess. ii. 19. And the people shall know those ministers who were the instruments of their conversion, &c. 2 Cor. i. 14. And those who have partook of the bounty of the pious rich, shall know their benefactors, and, perhaps, be commissioned to attend them in their dying moments, and convey them to heaven; on which account they are said to receive such into everlasting habitations. Luke xvi. 9. Loving each other, they shall rejoice in each other's happiness. They shall converse with angels, and with each other, and entertain one another with the most excellent discourses; as Moses and Elias talked with Christ and one another in the transfiguration. They will talk of all his wonderful works, and praise him in the most exalted strains; as David, when he said, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!" Ps. xxxiv. 3.

And as to the manner of this service, it will be,

1. Without weakness. There is much weakness in all our expressions when we worship before him. Our hearts, our graces, our souls, our bodies, are all weak, which make our services weak; but in heaven all our weakness shall be done away: "the body which is sown in weakness, shall be raised in power." 1 Cor. xv. 43.

2. Without weariness. Whatever made duties wearisome in the service of God here, shall be done away in heaven; there shall be rest from our labour. Rev. xiv. 13.

3. Without distraction. Worldly cares and fears often distract our minds while serving the Lord here; but in heaven there will be nothing from within or without to distract our minds in the service of God. Then the saints will be able to say, in the utmost extent, "My heart is fixed, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." Ps. lvii. 7.

4. Without interruption and intermission. There shall be no impediment from business, or need of sleep, attention to clothing, meat or drink; they shall "serve him day and night in his temple." Rev. vii. 15.

5. Without the least defect, imperfection, or sin. They shall be without fault before the throne of God. Rev. xiv. 5.

6. For ever, even to eternity. Their joys shall be eternal, so shall be their thankful services. Surely David intended this, when he said, again and again, "While I live will I praise the Lord; I will sing praises unto my God, while I have any being." Ps. cxlvi. 2.

III. That all those who serve God here, shall assuredly serve him in heaven; and the grounds of this assurance are,

1. The grace of God, and his intentions concerning us. 2. Tim. i. 9. Rom. viii. 30.

2. The merit and intercession of Christ, who hath redeemed us from among men, as the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb; Rev. xiv. 4; and upon the ground of this redemption, he prays, that where he is, there we may be also. John xvii. 24.

3. The Spirit's work upon the mind. It is he who makes us meet for the inheritance of the saints; Col. i. 12; and seals his servants to the day of redemption; Eph. iv. 30; and leads them into heaven, the land of uprightness. Ps. cxliii. 10.

4. The faithfulness of God, who hath promised thus to honour his servants. John xii. 26.

Improvement :

1. Is it so, that those who serve him here shall serve him in heaven hereafter ? then how awful will be the state of those who serve the enemies of Christ, the world, the flesh, Satan, and sin ! See their doom in Matt. xxiv. 51. Isa. lxv. 12—14.

2. Let the saints continue in their services to the Lord, and not desert him ; for if they do, he will cast them off for ever, and will not admit them to serve him in heaven ; 1 Chron. xxviii. 9 ; but if they continue faithful in his service, they shall abide in his love and favour, John xv. 10, and, if “ faithful unto death, shall receive the crown of life.” Rev. ii. 10.

3. Let them wait and watch for the coming of their Lord, in the way of their service and duty. Luke xii. 35, 36.

4. Let them long for the time when they shall be admitted to his throne, to see his face, saying, “ When shall I come and appear before God !” Ps. xlii. 2.

5. Let them endeavour to be as like his servants in heaven, in serving him here, as they possibly can : be much in the exercise of the duties of religion, because it is heavenly work, and shall be their blessed employment for ever.

CONSOLATIONS IN THE DEATH OF INFANTS.

In Ramah was a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, &c.—Matt. ii. 18.

THESE words were originally spoken by the prophet Jeremiah concerning the lamentations of the people of Jerusalem, at the several captivities prophesied of in another chapter, under the moving representation of a tender mother bewailing her infant children ; but it is applied here by the Evangelist to another purpose ; the destruction of the children of Bethlehem, by Herod king of the Jews. Matt. ii. 16—18. This prophecy is said to be fulfilled in this event, not only accommodated to it, but the true sense of the prophecy, and which only had its literal and full accomplishment in it.

I shall consider the case of the death of infants, and the comforts which may be drawn from the scriptures to sorrowful parents upon that account. This is a case which very frequently happens, and to most persons, at some time or other of their lives. And a tender case it commonly is, especially to the weaker sex : several circumstances often occur to render it grievous and compassionate ; as, when it is the child of our youth, the hopes of a family ; an only or a lovely child, endeared by little tendernesses of affection, and early buddings of reason and wisdom ; and this is sometimes carried to great excess. Indulgent mothers are apt to grieve as they are to love, to degrees of inordinacy ! and, like Rachel, “ mourn for their children, because they are not, and refuse to be comforted.”—“ The dear image is always before my eyes ; methinks I see and hear it wherever I go ; I cannot put the thoughts of it out of my mind ; but, oh ! the grief.”

I shall propose the proper grounds of support and method of relief in this case.

1. Consider the sovereignty and dominion of the great God. We ourselves are more his than our own, and more entirely at his disposal. Ps. c. 3. 1 Cor. vi. 20. We are absolutely his, upon the highest claims of creation and redemption, as his creatures, and his purchase. God challenges a propriety in the lives of his creatures; Deut. xxxii. 39; yea, the prophet represents his right in the souls of his creatures. Ezek. xviii. 4. This must reasonably hold with greater strength, in the case of every enjoyment of life, as the nearest relation, and the best possession of this world. Holy Job acknowledges God's sovereignty in his afflictions, and comforts himself with the consideration. Job i. 21.

2. Consider the righteousness of the Divine dispensation herein. God acts not only as an absolute, but as a wise and righteous Sovereign; he never acts with arbitrary will, or unreasonable pleasure; he is always bound by his own perfections, though subject to no superior; and can no more act unreasonably, than he can unjustly. Now, it is the just sentence of the broken law, and the natural effect of our fallen state, that we become mortal. The awful sentence of death was the consequence of sin; for this, "it is appointed for men once to die:" they must die some time or other. This is founded in reason and justice; but the seasons and circumstances of our death are a reserve of wisdom, and matter of pleasure, and lie in the breast of the Sovereign disposer and Lord of life.

Upon this ground, it is easy to account for the death of infants: they are under the common sentence of death: they are a part of the spoils and triumph of death in this world. The apostle says, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin," &c. Rom. v. 12. God, therefore, does no wrong, when he snatches a beloved child from a tender mother's arms. It was a noble saying of one of the ancients, upon the tidings of his son's death, "I knew that I begat a mortal."

3. Consider that no doubt can remain as to their future happiness. The guilt of Adam's transgression is atoned for by the undertaking and death of Christ. Rom. v. 18, 19. And, as the guilt is taken away, no punishment for that sin, in a future state, can follow; and, as children have no personal guilt of their own, their salvation in a future state is a necessary consequence: hence our Lord speaks as if heaven were principally occupied by these little innocents. Matt. xix. 13, 14.

4. They have answered the ends of their creation, and the purposes for which God sent them into the world. Indeed they make a short stay, and are less significant: they have lower capacities, and feebler powers, than those who grow to maturity. They are not capable of actual choice, or active service; but they serve to display the perfections and providence of God, and are so many instances of the Divine power, wisdom, and goodness, in the nice circumstances of their birth, and the tender care watching over them in their infant state; or of his righteousness and faithfulness in executing the sentence of death; perhaps of punishment and rebuke to over-indulgent parents, to try their faith and patience, or teach them submission and resignation to the Divine will. It would be well, if those who die in advanced years, did but answer the end of their creation as well as those who die in an infant state.

5. We know not what they might have proved, if they had lived. Fond parents often please themselves with fair appearances and future prospects. See Ps. cxxvii. 4; cxxviii. 3; cxliv. 12.

It is a rare and singular blessing, where there are many children, for all to prove good. Sometimes by natural weaknesses, carelessness, or accident, they contract deformities, which disable them for the service of life; 2 Sam. iv. 4; or prove wicked and rebellious from unhappy connexions. Gen. xxvi. 35. And Rebecca tells Isaac, "If Jacob," &c. xxvii. 46. While other play the prodigal. Luke xv. 12. It is better they should go to an early grave, than they should live to be unhappy themselves, or a grief to us. I have been informed of the case of a fond mother, who passionately praying for the life of a sick child, whatever it cost her, she had her desire; but he lived to come to an untimely end, and to break her heart.

6. Perhaps you have other children remaining, and cannot use the words of the patriarch. Gen. xliii. 14. If one is taken away, there are others left, in whom we may take comfort. So we find Eve comforts herself upon the death of Abel. Gen. iv. 25. Instead of repining at the loss of one, look upon the surviving offspring with thankfulness. Ps. cxxviii. 3.

7. Suppose the worst circumstance; that it is an only child, or that all are removed from us. See the case of Job, i. 18; the widow of Nain. Luke vii. 12. Consider that we received an only child from the Lord, and every one of our children; for they are the heritage of the Lord, and his work. Ps. cxxvii. 3. They are his gift to us, Gen. xxxiii. 5; xlviii. 9; but then his right to them remains, and they are more his than ours. He is the Father of their spirits; we only the fathers of the flesh. And has he not the rightful disposal of what he hath freely given? Must he ask our leave to remove his own, or we complain of injury or unkindness? Besides, have we not made a covenant-surrender of all we have to God, without reserve? See the ready compliance of Abraham, in the case of his only son; but, above all, consider the unequalled love of God, who gave his Son, his only Son, for us. John iii. 16. Isa. liii. 6—10.

8. Consider your own covenant-state, however. Your covenant-interest is secure; whatsoever he removes from you, God is yours, and all the promises of the new covenant; Christ the Son of God, is yours, and all the purchase of his blood. 1 Cor. iii. 22. This was David's comfort under the breaches and disappointments of his family. 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. It is a greater mercy to have God for our Father than to have the dearest child of our own; and to be ourselves children of God, and heirs of the heavenly inheritance, than to have a numerous family, and the greatest prosperity of life. Isa. lvi. 5.

9. We must quickly go to them, and be with them again. It is not an everlasting separation, or parting with them for good and all; it is only for a time. It is only the distance of the two worlds, and states, which is sometimes only a single step; or, it may be, the difference of a breath. The two worlds border upon and are contiguous to each other. In a little while, the veil which divides the two worlds shall be drawn aside, and a new scene of things will open. We shall find ourselves

agreeably surprised, and see them again, and enjoy them to greater advantage, never again to feel the pang of separation. So David comforted himself upon the death of his child by Bathsheba. 2 Sam. xii. 22. The tender infant, or beloved child, has only got the start, and is gone a little before : prepare to follow, instead of grieving immoderately. Turn the stream into a right channel ; dry up the tears from thine eyes, and refuse not to be comforted ; for thou shalt see them again in the other world, and be with them forever. In the mean time, there is this consolation left, that although thou hast brought forth children for the grave, yet they are brought for God, and for heaven too ; and though thou hast never a child left in this world, there are so many more gone before thee to heaven.

THE HAPPY END OF A USEFUL LIFE.

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep.—Acts xiii. 36.

THE words are part of the apostle's discourse at Antioch, and relate to the proof that Jesus is the true Messiah promised to the fathers, "because God raised him from the dead," verse 30 : and this was evident, in that "he was seen many days of them who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who were his witnesses to the people," verse 31. And he was raised from the dead with this peculiar circumstance, "now no more to see corruption : death hath no more dominion over him," Rom. vi. 9, as it had in the case of Lazarus and the widow's son.

The words of our text contain the character and description of a good and useful man, in the person of David. In speaking to them, I shall consider,

I. The character of his useful life : "He served his own generation by the will of God."

1. His life is a state of service. David had the peculiar commendation of being "a man after God's own heart ;" *i. e.* of great sincerity, and entire devotedness to God. He did much, and had it in his heart to do more for God ; Acts vii. 46 ; "and was zealous for the Lord." Ps. lxxix. 9, 10. He was faithful to the interest of God in an exalted station, for many years together, in the main bent and course of his life, though not without his imperfections and faults ; like a flaw in a diamond, or a spot in the body of a sun ; yet, with the clearest marks of a sound and deep repentance.

A Christian's whole life is a state of service and warfare. We are to work the works of God, and contend with our spiritual enemies. Our situation is like that of the Jews mentioned in Neh. iv. 17. The apostle represents this by a hearty devotedness to Christ, and engagement in his service, Acts xxvi. 17, 18 ; and makes it matter of solemn appeal and thanksgiving to God. Rom. i. 9. 2 Tim. i. 3. This is made the end of our redemption by Christ. Luke i. 74. "He redeems us from all iniquity, that we should be zealous of good works." Tit. ii. 14. And it is the ultimate view, in all the duties of every relation, that we serve

the Lord Christ ; Col. iii. 24 ; and the opposite term, of the Christian's conversion from his gentile state. 1 Thess. i. 9. And this service must be done heartily, with the united exercise of all our powers. Rom. xii. 12.

2. He serves his generation. David was of a public spirit, and serviceable to others as well as to himself. He was useful both as a ruler and a prophet, to the church and to the world. Ps. lxxviii. 72. The word we render generation signifies also age : he was a blessing to the age or generation in which he lived. The one refers to the people among whom he lived ; the other to the period of time in which he lived.

A good man is a public good, and makes others about him the better for him : "he looks not at his own things," &c. Phil. ii. 4. Paul calls himself the servant of all ; 1 Cor. ix. 19 ; and all things to all men, verse 22 ; and a debtor to all. Rom. i. 14. He imitates his Lord, who went about doing good to the bodies and the souls of men. He strives to do good to his neighbours and friends, to the world at large, and especially to the church. Gal. vi. 10. And for this reason, the death of a good man is a public loss : the world loses a friend and a benefactor.

3. He is especially concerned to serve his own generation. David served his own generation : and although he was serviceable to after-ages, by his victories, writings, and preparations for building the temple ; yet, that which is particularly remarked here is, that "he served his own generation." And every good man is taught by his example, to be serviceable to the generation and age in which he lives : he should improve his talents and trusts with faithful diligence, to every purpose of the divine glory, and all the interests of the kingdom of God in the world : he should make his own hands and eyes, as much as may be, his executors and overseers. Some are so careful to do good to posterity, that the world is more beholden to death than to them, for all the good they do : and what they leave is often misapplied, or mismanaged, by unfaithfulness and neglect ; and, it may be, in a course of years, entirely sunk and lost.

4. This service is measured and determined by the Divine will. "He served his own generation by the will of God : " or, as it might be rendered, that, in his generation, he served the will of God ; *i. e.* he served the purposes of the Divine will in the generation in which he lived. Or, to follow our own rendering, that in all his services he was under the direction of the will of God ; of his disposing will, placing him in his high station, and in the different capacities of a prince and prophet. We also must serve God in those stations in which his providence hath placed us ; and serve God in his own way, in that station he may see fit to place us, whether it be public or private, rich or poor, short or long : we must readily comply with our own prayers, when we say, "thy will be done." Paul paid the profoundest deference to the Divine will ; 1 Cor. xvi. 7 ; James iv. 15 ; also his commanding will. It was said of David, that "he would fulfil all God's will," ver. 22 ; which is explained by keeping that which the Lord commanded. 1 Sam. xiii. 14.

II. I am to consider his happy and comfortable death. "He fell asleep." The metaphor is often used in scripture, to signify the happy death of good men ; and I think it is never applied but to them, in this sense. It is so applied to David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah.

in the Old Testament ; and to Lazarus and Stephen in the New. And it is thus represented, on such accounts as these :

1. With respect to the temper of their minds, or the ease and calm of spirit with which they die. Death is not terrible to a good man, who has a clear sense of his own integrity and the favour of God. It is like shutting our eyes, and going to sleep ; the putting off the body, is like pulling off our clothes, or being unclothed, and lying down in the grave ; it is like stripping and going to bed. So God said to Moses, with an air of familiarity, "Go up into Mount Nebo, and die in the mount ;" go take thy rest, and bid the world good night. The reason of this, death has lost its sting, the curse is removed, sin is pardoned, faith is in experience, and hope is lively. Death is a covenant-friend, and does them a kind office ; they wait for their change with patience, and welcome it with joy. 1 Cor. xv. 35—37.

2. As it is a cessation and rest from the toil of the foregoing life. As men rest from their ordinary labour, and forget the cares and sorrows of life, when they lay themselves down to sleep ; so a good man, at death, finishes his course of service, and has "fought the good fight of faith :" his warfare is accomplished. There is an end to every thing which made them uneasy here ; of sickness and pain of body, and cares and grief of mind. Rev. xiv. 13 ; xxi. 4.

3. With respect to their being awaked and raised up at last. They are fallen asleep indeed, but they will awake again, and rise at the general resurrection. See what David says of himself, Ps. xvii. 15 ; and of the wicked, xlix. 14. The prophet says, "thy dead men shall live ;" Isa. xxvi. 19 ; and, more directly to the subject, Dan. xii. 2. Consult also Hosea, xiii. 14 ; John xi. 11 ; and 1 Thess. iv. 14. They will rise with new vigour of nature, and capacities more enlarged and improved ; and then the glorified body shall be joined to its soul, and both be completely happy, and never be parted any more.

III. I am to consider the relation between these two, and show how the one depends upon the other ; *i. e.* how a life of useful service is the way to a comfortable death, and will have a blessed end.

1. It is the best evidence of our sincerity, or the truth of our grace ; abundantly more so, than the most splendid profession, or the most rapacious pretensions. This was the comfort of the apostle's soul, when he had the sentence of death in himself. 2 Cor. i. 9—12.

2. It entitles us to certain promises of the covenant. For though the promises of the new covenant are gracious and free, in opposition to merit, strictly speaking, being all founded in the blood of Christ, and are all yea and amen in him ; yet they are not promiscuous and common, but limited to a qualified subject. We can only lay claim to the promise on the gracious terms of it. See Rom. ii. 7. Heb. vi. 11, 12. 2 Pet. i. 10. Rev. xxii. 14.

3. It will minister comfortable reflections to our mind at last ; and although we cannot oblige the Almighty by our best services, yet they will admit of a comfortable review, and yield powerful supports in a dying hour. See 2 Kings xx. 3. Neh. v. 19 ; xiii. 22. Ps. xxvi. 1. And what a comfortable thing must it be for a believer to be able to say at the last, with his blessed Lord, "I have glorified thee," &c. John xvii. 4.

4. It is a good reason of our future hopes. A good man may look forward, as well as backward, with comfort and peace, in a dying hour. See the apostle's case, 2 Tim. iv. 7.

Apply the subject in some practical remarks.

1. It reproves those who are of an opposite character, and do not serve their generation; men of a narrow, selfish spirit, who only serve themselves, and mind their own things; or, it may be, hurt their generation, by doing harm to all about them. Eccl. ix. 18.

2. We should be cautioned hence, that under a pretence of serving our generation, we do not neglect our own souls. We should begin at home, and see that our hearts are right with God.

3. Let me exhort every one to serve his generation by the will of God. Be not slothful but fervent in spirit; do it heartily, and with all your might give all diligence, and measure all your service by the Divine will.

4. Be excited to the service of your generation by the consideration of your death. It may be near, and there is no work in the grave, &c. Fill up the little space of uncertain time with faithful diligence and proper duty; for death may stop you short in a full career, and cut you off in the midst of your designs. Ps. cxlvi. 4.

DILIGENCE IN DUTY NECESSARY,

TO BE FOUND OF GOD IN PEACE.

Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.—2 Pet. iii. 14.

The apostle in speaking, in the preceding verses, of the drowning of the world by water, the coming of the day of the Lord, the destruction of the world by fire, and of a better state of things, in answer to the scoffers of the last days, who said, "Where is the promise of his coming? Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were." Ver. 4. The words are an inference, or conclusion, from these premises, "Wherefore, beloved, since ye look for such things." I shall have occasion to consider the context in speaking to the words; what I propose is, to draw forth the sense of them in the several parts of which they consist.

1. It is here supposed that we must be judged, and that an inquiry will be made into the states of men. This is implied in the expression, "being found in him;" i. e. by him as Judge, or before him, when he shall come. The apostle uses the same expression in the same sense, Phil. iii. 9. The term relates to the final judgment, when the great inquiry shall be made, and the states of men determined. The future judgment is particularly represented and described in scripture: I shall give you a short view of it to engage and affect your minds.

1. The time of it is appointed. The apostle here speaks of the day of judgment, and the coming of the day of God. 2 Pet. ii. 9, and iii.

12. The period is determinately fixed; Acts xvii. 31; but of that day

and hour knoweth no man. When the period arrives, there will not be a moment's delay ; and it will come too soon, come when it will, for those who scoff at the seeming delay.

2. The Judge is ordained. This our Lord himself tells us, John v. 22, 27 ; and again Rom. ii. 16. 2 Cor. v. 10. The Saviour of sinners is to be Judge of sinners. His appearance will be very glorious, and with great magnificence and grandeur. Luke ix. 26.

3. The rule of judgment is fixed, or the measure of proceeding at that day. We are to be tried by the gospel of Christ, and not by the law of innocence. If he were to enter into judgment with us, and to be strict to mark iniquity, no living creature could be justified, or stand before him. The whole world must be condemned at his bar, and upon the ground of rigorous justice. But we shall be judged by the gospel of Christ, and according to the gracious constitution of the new covenant ; so the apostle says, Rom. ii. 16. The apostle James is more direct, chap. i. 25, where he calls the gospel the law of liberty ; also, the perfect law of liberty, chap. ii. 12 ; and which the apostle calls the law of faith, Rom. iii. 27, in opposition to the law of works ; which accepts of true believers in Christ, or sincerity of heart, without absolute perfection, and with many imperfections. This is included in the books which shall be opened, Rev. xx. 12 ; and according to which he will judge the world in righteousness.

4. The persons to be judged are the whole world, or the whole race of sinful man. All who die in Adam shall be judged by Christ, as well as made alive by him ; for they are raised in order to be judged. All nations are to be gathered before him. Matt. xxv. 32. We are all to appear before him, 2 Cor. v. 10, the small and great, Rev. xx. 12.

5. The matter of judgment, or the cause to be tried, is expressed in the most comprehensive terms, Eccl. xii. 14 ; and this is the constant language of the gospel. 2 Cor. v. 10. So that every man shall be rewarded according to his deeds ; Rom. ii. 6 ; being judged according to their works. Rev. xx. 13 ; xxii. 12. God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ ; the most retired transactions of their lives, and the workings of their thoughts and desires, which lie concealed in their own breast, and fall not under the notice of others ; and every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof ; Matt. xii. 36 ; *i. e.* every evil word, which is either false or hurtful.

6. And then there is the final issue and event of judgment ; *i. e.* rewards and punishments. To the righteous it will be, " Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord ;" and " Come, ye blessed," &c. Matt. xxv. 34, 41. To the wicked it will be, " Thou wicked and slothful servant ; cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth ; and, Go, ye cursed," &c. Ver. 46. The execution of the sentence will immediately follow, " For these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." They each shall go to their respective, final, and unchangeable state ; and so, from the consequence of it, it is called the eternal judgment, Heb. vi. 2.

II. Observe, that a Christian's great concern is to be found of his Judge in peace, and without spot and blameless. Here is a double ex-

pression used, which evidently refers to two different things of the greatest importance.

1. It refers to our justification and acceptance with God, which is the state of every true believer. There can be no peace in the day of judgment to a fallen sinner, but in the way of forgiveness. We must be pardoned and justified through the blood of Christ; for that is the measure of our present acceptance with God, which will be the rule of the final judgment: so the apostle says, Phil. iii. 9, which is parallel to that of the apostle, Acts xiii. 39; also Gal. ii. 16. Thus we are brought into a state of friendship with God; for, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Rom. v. 1.

The consequence of this is, peace of mind; a composed frame of mind, without the uneasiness of a doubt, or torment of fear, or dread of Divine displeasure. A blessed serenity of mind, arising from the testimony of conscience to their own sincerity, and the witness of the Spirit to their relation to God. They have that peace of God which passes all understanding; which none of the troubles of life, or fear of death, nor the presence of the Judge, or the terror of judgment, can disturb.

And this will appear in a peaceable frame of mind towards others: in good-will towards all men, fervent love to all the children of God. Heb. xii. 14.

I shall only farther add, that although the believer is justified already; yet we are most properly justified at the final judgment, when it will be most solemn and most complete.

2. It refers to our sanctification and holiness. This is the import of the other expression, "without spot and blameless." This may refer to our present sanctification, which is called the sanctification of the Spirit, &c. Eph. i. 4. For this end God has chosen believers; Phil. ii. 15; and they are to keep themselves unspotted, &c. James i. 27. This was the character of Zachariah and Elizabeth. Luke i. 6. And as such, Jesus Christ will present them to himself at last. Eph. v. 27; also 1 Thess. iii. 13. It is a great act of the mediation of Christ towards his members, not only to "wash them in his own blood, but to present them pure and faultless at last." This certainly was the grand end of his whole undertaking. See Tit. ii. 14; also 1 Pet. iii. 18. Paul represents it as the highest ambition of the Christian's heart, 2 Cor. v. 9, and the greatest blessing he could wish for others. Phil. i. 10.

III. That, in order to our being found of our Judge in peace, we must be diligent. It is a work of labour and care, and not to be done with idleness and sloth. Men may sit still and perish; but they must be diligent who would be saved. Consider this diligence, according to the scripture account of it, in the following instances:

1. There must be the due exercise of our natural faculties and reasonable powers. Those, we readily admit, are weakened and disordered by sin; but divine assistance is promised by God, who is the God of nature as well as grace. We are reasonable creatures, when we are not holy creatures, and can act as men when we cannot act as saints; and in order to being such, see Deut. xxxii. 29. Isa. xlv. 8. Hos. v. 4. 1 Cor. xiv. 20. Phil. ii. 12.

2. The improvement of the talents and enjoyments of life. Every

man has his proper talents, besides his natural powers, though in different degrees, for which he must account at last. Matt. xxv. 14. Luke xix. 13. Such are life and health, acquired knowledge and experience, liberty and opportunity, possessions and prosperity, interest and credit in the world. Those who improve therein shall be commended, Matt. xxv. 21, and those who do not improve them shall be punished. Ver. 26. We are only stewards of our talents, Luke xvi. 2, and our Lord advises a proper use of them, ver. 9 ; also the apostle, 1 Tim. vi. 17.

3. We must perform the proper duties of our place and station. John ix. 4. In this sense our Lord pronounces his servants blessed ; Matt. xxiv. 46 ; and this the apostle recommends. 2 Pet. i. 10. Faithfulness in the way of duty is a good preparation for the coming of the Lord. 1 Cor. xv. 58.

4. There must be watchfulness against sin. So our Lord directs his disciples in this case. Luke xxi. 34. In this view he often requires watchfulness. Matt. xxvi. 41, 42. Mark xiii. 37. The apostle abounds with exhortations to sobriety and watchfulness. 1 Thess. v. 6, 8. 1 Pet. iv. 7. Heb. xii. 15, 17. And the Judge is represented saying, "Behold, I come ; blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments." Rev. xvi. 15.

The use of appointed means, or institutions of worship. These are properly means of grace. Thus we must be found in the daily practice of prayer. Luke xviii. 1. ; also xxi. 36. We must converse with the word of God. Heb. ii. 1. 2 Pet. i. 19 ; and the apostle says, that "God is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him," or come to him in any way of worship or service. Particularly the Lord's Supper is a perpetual memorial, not only of the death, but of the coming of Christ. 1 Cor. xi. 26. Thus, by frequent converse with God in the ordinances of his worship, and receiving communications from him, we are formed to a more spiritual frame and serious habit of mind, and in a nearer fitness for the coming of the Lord. Hereupon,

6. There must be the exercise and improvement of suitable graces, or proper dispositions of mind, 2 Pet. i. 5 ; iii. 18 ; particularly faith ; Heb. vi. 1 ; also hope, Heb. vi. 11. 1 Pet. i. 13 ; and looking. Tit. ii. 13. Heb. ix. 28. Jude, ver. 21. 2 Pet. iii. 14.

IV. I shall consider the motives and reasons of this diligence here suggested and referred to. This is intimated in the words of connexion, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things ;" *i. e.* the things which he had been speaking of, or the arguments of his foregoing discourse. The great ideas in his mind at that time were,

1. The destruction of the present world, 2 Pet. iii. 7, to be accomplished by a deluge of fire ; also, 2 Pet. iii. 10, the whole globe of the earth shall be set on fire, and whatever belongs to it, and has been infected with sin. All the works of nature and of art, the stately buildings and proud places, the monuments of vanity, ambition and curiosity, which have endured for many ages, and stood the longest injuries of time ; all the grandeur and glory of this world, the pageantry and show of it, will be then destroyed and consumed to ashes, and there will be no remainder or ruins of them left ; "for the heavens shall pass away," &c. 2 Pet. iii. 10.

There will be a universal conflagration ; heaven and earth will be all on fire at once, and make one burning vault, one funeral pile ; it will be the funeral of the world. What will be the terror of the affrighted inhabitants ! no place of refuge ! Yea, the fire which will consume the world, will destroy the wicked. 2 Pet. iii. 7. Now, how forcible is the reason ! Be diligent to be found of him in peace, when the great day of his wrath shall come.

2. The expectation of a better state. 2 Pet. iii. 13. He represents it as the common expectation of Christians, grounded on the promise of God : “ We, according to his promise, look for it, a new heaven and a new earth.” Isa. lxv. 17. Heaven and earth will be alike, at least for a limited time, and become a glorious state, in which only righteousness and righteous persons shall dwell. And the expectation of such a state of things should operate as a powerful motive, that we may not come short of the glory of God, but be fit to partake of it, and share in all the blessedness of it. Let us, therefore, according to our Lord’s direction, “ watch and pray, that we may be accounted worthy to escape all these things which shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.” And, in the words of the apostle, “ give diligence, so an entrance shall be ministered abundantly into the everlasting kingdom ;” and let us “ labour to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” Heb. iv. 11.

CONSOLATIONS

IN THE DEATH OF GOOD MEN, IN THE MIDST OF THEIR DAYS.

He weakened my strength in the way, he shortened my days: I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days, thy years are throughout all generations.—Ps. cii. 23, 24.

WHAT the Psalmist here apprehends for himself, is sometimes actually the case with other good men : “ He weakens their strength in the way, and takes them away in the midst of their days.” Nothing is more affecting to considerate minds, and more dark and unaccountable in providence, than when eminently good and useful persons are removed in early life, while wicked and useless persons are spared to old age. It carries something strange in its appearance, and is contrary to nature. That old persons die, worn out with service and decays of nature, is no wonder, and a less loss to the world ; that is agreeable to the course of nature, and what every one expects. But when younger persons are cut off in the midst of their days, and the height of their usefulness, richly furnished, and ripe for service, like blossoms nipped in the tender bud, which promised much fair fruit, when one dies, &c. Job. xxi. 23, this naturally strikes the mind with surprise and astonishment ; and we are apt not only to grieve at the loss, but to be shocked at the appearance, and puzzled at the dispensation, and to say with the Psalmist, on

a like occasion, "the days of his youth," &c. Ps. lxxxix. 45, 47. I propose,

I. To inquire into the reasons of this dispensation, and consider what account can be given of it.

1. There is the sovereignty of the Divine will. God is the Creator of the world, and the natural Lord of his own creation. He is an absolute Sovereign, and he is only fit to exercise such a power, who is infinitely perfect, and can never mistake or use it ill. We have nothing to fear from one who acts under the conduct of infinite wisdom and goodness in all his ways.

His sovereignty and dominion extends to all his creatures in heaven and earth. Angels move at his command and do his will. It extends to all the circumstances of life; our birth, abode, relations, and conditions of life. Acts xvii. 26. Yea, it reaches to life itself. Ps. xxxi. 15. The different periods of our time in the world, and of our departure out of it. Job. xiv. 5. He claims it as a prerogative of Deity. Deut. xxxii. 39. He has the keys of hell and death; and this is always a reason for silence and satisfaction. Rev. i. 17, 18.

And his dominion is uncontrollable, as well as absolute. Job ix. 12. Nor is he accountable to his creatures for his proceedings. Job xxxiii. 13. But the will of God is always reasonable, and we may without presumption, assign other reasons of this conduct; though we cannot pretend to take in all his views, or dive to the bottom of his designs; and therefore,

2. It is a point of wisdom. We are born mortal, and under sentence of death. Rom. v. 12. We have the seeds of mortality in our nature; and tend to dissolution, though no accident should befall us: and we are under the sentence of the violated law, and liable to the execution of it every moment, from our birth to our dissolution. It must be executed some time or other; but now the time and season of it is not settled by the Divine law. It is left to the Divine pleasure, and is a point of wisdom, at what period, and in what circumstances of life it shall take place, whether in youth or in old age; and it is highly reasonable to suppose, that the only wise God shall remove us from the world when he thinks fittest and best; and which, if we knew all circumstances, we ourselves would highly approve.

3. It is a display of his all-sufficiency; to show that he can do without the best instruments, or raise up others in their place. When the Lord is pleased to take away an active, useful person out of the world, we are apt to despond in such a case, and to tremble for the interest of religion in a particular family or place. But we often find it otherwise. He sometimes removes eminent instruments of public good, to make room for others to stand up in their place; and some, by such providences, have been drawn out of obscurity, and have been eminently useful in the church and in the world. Thus God raised up Joshua upon the death of Moses: and great as Moses was, Joshua was honoured to do that which Moses was not worthy of; and young Elisha had a double portion of Elijah's spirit, when he was taken up from him. The residue of the Spirit is with the Lord, and he can furnish and spirit others for his service, according to his will and pleasure.

4. It is in great mercy to themselves. It is a great kindness to them, though it is a grief and loss to us. Thus, for example, he sometimes removes them from the evil of the world, and impending calamities coming upon it; Isa. lvii. 1; or, they may be taken from the snares of life and the temptations of sin, which might be too hard for them, and endanger their being entangled and overcome; 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21; iii. 17; "and when they were once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, fall away." Heb. vi. 4. In wise compassion to their infirmity, and tender concern for their safety, he takes them away in the midst of their days; and, that they may not be tried above what they are able, sometimes make this way of escape out of it.

Besides, it is a great instance of Divine mercy, that he takes them the sooner to heaven, and gives them their reward betimes. They are not only the sooner out of danger, but the sooner happy; and, we may add, that God will accept the purposes of their heart, as to any farther work they intended to do for him. 1 Kings viii. 18.

5. It may be considered as an act of justice, and as the punishment of sin. God may remove useful persons out of the world for their own sin. He may see fit to contend with them for former miscarriages, by cutting their life short, though their souls are accepted and saved, particularly for disobedience to parents: see the fifth commandment, which promises long life to obedience, and implies a premature death for the contrary. See the case of the Israelites, Ps. xcix. 8. Hezekiah, 2 Kings xx.

Or else, they may be removed for the sins of others. God may take them away for our over indulgence, and too great opinion and expectations from them; we may kill them with our kindness, by provoking the Lord to jealousy, when we put them in his place.

Or else it may be, on the other hand, when they are neglected and slighted. God sometimes punishes the ungrateful world, by removing early eminent persons, whom they did not know how to value or treat with kindness. And of them it might be said, "of whom the world was not worthy."

6. It is for the good of others, and to exercise the graces and virtues of those who survive. It is one of the greatest trials of life, to part with beloved relations and friends out of this world, especially in their younger years of life. The design of such dispensations is to try and exercise our graces, and to excite our diligence in every service of God and duty of life. What so proper as the thoughts of death, to inspire our sluggish souls with life and vigour, and make us fervent in spirit, and zealous in good works; to keep up a lively sense of religion in the world, and a constant care to please God?

7. To be a standing monument of human frailty, and give warning to all about them. It is a home instance to younger Christians, and younger ministers, when any of such eminence and worth are taken away; and they being dead, speak to us who survive, prepare to follow; be ye also ready. And to be sure, elder persons are concerned to take the warning, for if younger than we die before us, to be sure we must quickly follow.

8. Perhaps it may be considered as an instance of our conformity to

Christ. As the servant must not be above the Lord, and we must not expect kinder usage from the world than he met with, so we must not wonder if we are suffered to stay no longer in it than he did. He had a short ministry of three years, and a life of thirty-three.

Perhaps they have done a great deal of work in a short time, as he did. And although no man can say as the man Christ Jesus did, "it is finished;" I have done all the work I designed to do for God before I die; yet they may have filled up a short life with great service, and run over a great compass of ground in their short race. Perhaps they have begun a good work, and left impressions on the minds of many, which others must bring to perfection.

9. It is to make heaven more desirable to us, and raise our hearts more powerfully thither. Every good man lost out of this world, is gained to the other, and heaven is the richer for the death of every saint. How many Christian friends have got the start of us and gone to heaven before us! One would be tempted to envy their felicity. Should not this make heaven more familiar to us, more agreeable to our thoughts, that so many are called thither, who once dwelt in flesh, and were dear to us, and high in our esteem?

And though God is the chief good, the centre of blessedness, and rest of souls, and that is the great reason and motive of our choice and love of heaven; yet the Divine Being is vastly above our thoughts, and our best conceptions of him are very imperfect. Job xxxvi. 26. But the consideration of the glorified Redeemer in our nature, and of our fellow Christians there, is a more sensible thing, and a great relief to our thoughts, and is both more within our reach, and more apt to impress and affect our minds.

II. Let me direct you to the proper improvement of the subject, that it may be useful to ourselves.

1. We should reverence and adore the Divine sovereignty and wisdom, and say, "O the depth," &c. Rom. xi. 33. And what we know not now, we shall know hereafter. John xiii. 7.

2. Let us look more to God, and live more entirely upon him. Eye the living God more, and the creatures less. Place more dependence upon God, and less on men. There we shall never be disappointed; here we cannot fail of being so.

3. Let us comfort ourselves in their loss by the consideration of the mercy it is to them. How much more safe and happy are they in heaven than they would be on earth! It is well with them, however it is with us. We should therefore rejoice at their preferment: so our Lord said to his sorrowful disciples. John xiv. 28.

4. Yet we should be humbled under a sense of their loss, and lament it as a great affliction. Though we must not weep for them, yet we ought to weep ourselves; as it is a loss to us and the world about us. And when this is done in a qualified degree, with submission to the will of God, we may very properly lament their loss. Jesus wept for Lazarus, the elders of Ephesus for Paul, that they should see his face no more. Acts xx. 37, 38. And we may sorrow, only not as those who have no hope. 1 Thess. iv. 13.

5. It should teach us to value useful men while they live, and make

the best use of them we can. Labour to be better for them, and get some good by them, while you have them. John the Baptist was a burning and shining light; John v. 35; in his ministry and conversation; and the people rejoiced in it for a season; for he died young, too.

6. The reasonableness of early religion, and being in good earnest about it: and here let me caution you against dangerous delays, and reckoning upon long life, and neglecting present duty. How natural is this in youth and health! and let the consideration of dying young be a powerful restraint from youthful vanities and vice. Early piety will make you wise, secure, and happy. And let me particularly recommend it to young persons to think of their baptismal covenant, and of solemnly renewing it at the Lord's table.

7. What reason of thankfulness for longer life and opportunity! It is certainly a great mercy in itself and in the intention of God; for the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation. 2 Pet. iii. 15. Let us not alter the nature of it by continued neglects and disobedience, and turn it into a greater aggravation of sin.

8. Let us all be mindful of our own mortality, and quickened to daily preparation. Do something every day for eternity, that you may be found in a safe state and prepared frame of mind; and that in whatsoever hour of the night, or age of life, our Lord shall come, we may not be surprised unprepared; but be found ready and watching, and waiting, and looking for his appearance.

THE

NATURE AND MINISTRY OF ANGELS.

The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.—Ps. xxxiv. 7.

THIS psalm is supposed to have been penned by David when he changed his behaviour before Achish, the king of Gath, called in the title of this psalm, Abimelech; this being a common name for all the kings of the Philistines; as Pharaoh was common to the kings of Egypt, and as Cæsar was common to the Roman emperors. The history of David's situation is recorded, 1 Sam. xxi. 10. The means of his deliverance is particularly noticed in the text and context. He prayed to his God. Ps. xxxiv. 4, 6. His friends also prayed for him. Ps. xxxiv. 5. And the angels of God encamped round about him. "The angel, or angels of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him," &c. Such is the love of God to his children, that he appoints many angels, on particular occasions, no less than a host, enough to form an encampment, to save his servants. I shall,

I. Offer a few remarks relative to those beings who tend the righteous; and,

1. They are real beings, not imaginary beings, or apparitions only. This was the error of the sadducees. Acts xxiii. 8. But the scripture declares them to have a personal subsistence. Hence they are said to be

sent forth. Heb. i. 14. They are spirits that speak. Acts x. 3. They are living creatures, Ezek. i. 5, by which are meant angels, as they are called cherubim, Ezek. x. 16. And they are called authorities and powers. 1 Pet. iii. 22. And as such possessing understanding and will; and they do such things as none but reasonable agents can do. They admire God's wisdom. Eph. iii. 10. They converse with each other, and excite each other to glorify God. Isa. vi. 3.

2. They are secondary beings. Some heathen philosophers supposed the angels to be co-eternal with God; but this cannot be. There can be but one first, one eternal Being. This is God's prerogative. Hab. i. 12. God created them, Col. i. 15, in one of the six days, during which all things were created. Ex. xx. 11. For, before the seventh day, the heavens and all the hosts thereof were created. Gen. ii. 1, 2. The stars are the host of that heaven which we behold; but the angels are the hosts of the third heaven, which to us on earth is invisible; they are so called, Neh. ix. 6. They were created before the earth; therefore, before the third day of the week, for on that day the earth was created when the sons of God shouted for joy. Job xxxviii. 7. In the Septuagint, it is "all the angels." It is probable they were created, with the light, on the first day of the week, hence called morning stars, not only stars, in respect to their brightness and glory, but morning stars, as being formed in the morning, the very beginning of creation.

3. They are most excellent and glorious creatures. Man is the most excellent creature upon earth; but inferior to angels even in his best estate. Ps. viii. 5. Solomon calls them higher than the greatest tyrants that oppress the earth. Eccl. v. 8. Of all creatures they most resemble God. They resemble God in being spiritual beings, not clothed with flesh and blood as we are. They are immortal beings, and what they now are, they shall ever be. They are wise and knowing, as it respects nature and the affairs of the world. Dan x. 13. And their natural knowledge is increased by the experience of nearly six thousand years. They also possess a great deal of revealed knowledge concerning the scriptures. Dan. x. 21. Also concerning individuals before they are born. Dan. xi. 6. Hence they are said to be full of eyes. Rev. iv. 6. Eyes behind, knowing what is past; and eyes before, knowing what is to come. They are holy beings, called holy ones. Dan. iv. 17. Holy angels. Matt. xxv. 31. Angels of light. 2 Cor. xi. 14. All these things show that the angels, of all other creatures, most resemble God.

They are very numerous. They are called a great company. Ps. lxxviii. 11. There are thousands of them. Ps. lxxviii. 17. The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; nay, there are millions of them. Dan. vii. 10. Rev. v. 11. Nay, they are innumerable. Heb. xii. 22. Bildad asks, "Is there any number of his armies?" Job xxv. 3. Christ tells Peter that he could call to his assistance twelve legions (a legion is 6,666) of angels, which was equal to the amount of the whole Roman army. God can spare multitudes of angels to the assistance of his servants.

5. They are very powerful. They excel in strength. Ps. ciii. 20. They are called mighty angels. 2 Thess. i. 7. One angel is able to destroy all the men in the world. Their great power is manifest by

what they have done. Iron gates cannot stand before them. Acts xii. 10. An angel can make the earth shake, Matt. xxviii. 2; and occasion a most terrible destruction in a short time, as in the case of the first-born in Egypt; the army of Sennacherib; Sodom and Gomorrah, &c.

6. They are orderly. Hence called a host or an army. It is certain that some, in their employment and office, are superior to others. There are some who are captains and leaders of others, who follow them. The text says, "the angel of the Lord encampeth," &c. One angel cannot make a camp, but many can, under the conduct of one, as doubtless was the case here. One particular angel announced the birth of Christ; Luke ii. 9; and a multitude, under his conduct, praised God upon the occasion. Luke ii. 13. The scriptures speak not only of angels, but also of archangels: these are styled chief princes. Dan. x. 13. We have the names of one or two. One is named Michael; Dan. xii. 1; Jude, verse 9; 1 Thess. iv. 16; who seems to be the chief of all the angels and archangels of God, and who, by a way of eminence, is called the archangel and the great prince. Dan. xii. 1. They are supposed to be seven in number, signified by the seven lamps in the temple, before the mercy seat. Zech. iv. 10. Hence John speaks of the seven spirits of God, &c. Rev. v. 6, who are called seven angels. Rev. viii. 2. These seem to be the general inspectors of the whole world, and thence are said to be sent forth into all the earth.

7. They are all at God's disposal. Hence called the angels of the Lord, angels of God, and spirits of God: they are sometimes called the spirits of the Lord. 1 Kings xviii. 12. Acts viii. 39. He is their great head and leader, and is hence called the Lord of Hosts. They stand in his presence, Luke i. 19.

II. Consider who are the objects of their attention and care.

1. The world in general. Many great men have been wonderfully protected and delivered by the angels of God, out of respect to the church and people. This was the case with Darius, the Persian emperor; Dan. xi. 1; also Alexander the Great; and neither of them feared God; but they were God's instruments to accomplish his designs in the world, and, as such, protected and delivered by angels.

Great mercies and judgments are dispersed by them. They are as a lamp to the righteous, to light and direct them; and as coals of fire to the wicked, to punish and consume them. David expected they would punish his enemies. Ps. xxxv. 5, 6. Sodom was destroyed by them. Gen. xix. 13. Seventy thousand Israelites fell by the plague, which was brought upon them by an angel. 2 Sam. xxiv. 16. When Jerusalem was to be destroyed, the angels forsook it, and a voice was heard saying, "let us go hence." And Tacitus reports, that in Jerusalem there was a voice heard, greater than human, saying, "the gods are departing from this place." The trumpets in the Revelation, signifying judgments on the Roman empire, were sounded by angels; and the vials, denoting judgments on the papal power, are poured out by angels, because these things are effected by their ministry.

In times of war, wonderful victories are obtained by their invisible agency. They occasioned the sound in the mulberry trees, through which David obtained the victory, 2 Sam. v. 24. See also 2 Kings vii.

6. The angels fought against the king of Persia. Dan. x. 20. No wonder that the inconsiderable number of Grecians routed and destroyed the Persian army which consisted of several millions, when the angels fought against them.

The great revolutions which happen in the world are effected by their ministry; when the living creatures went, then the wheels went with them. The world moved as the angels of God moved. They deposed Nebuchadnezzar, and gave his crown to another. Dan. iv. 17. When Belshazzar was slain, Babylon taken, &c. it was by their agency. An angel wrote the hand-writing on the wall, intimating to the king and his nobles the fate which awaited them. When Darius got the empire, an angel assisted him to keep it. Dan. xi. 1. The great revolution which took place in the world at the conversion of Constantine the Great was brought about by angels. Rev. xii. 7. Thus we see, that this visible world is by God's appointment governed by the invisible world.

2. The church of God. This might be signified by the cherubims on the curtains belonging to the tabernacle. Ex. xxvi. 1. Also by the cherubims on the walls of the temple. They promote the salvation of the church. Heb. i. 14. An angel directed Peter to Cornelius and his family. Acts x. 30. Paul and others were directed by an angel to preach in Macedonia. Acts xvi. 9. When Jerusalem was besieged by the Assyrians, it is said the angel of the Lord went out and smote the camp of the Assyrians. 2 Kings xix. 35. From which it appears, that an angel did reside in, and preside over that city, where the temple was, who upon this occasion went out of it. So then, as one observes, angels are the guard of the queen of heaven, the Lamb's wife.

3. Individuals who fear God; such are the objects of their particular and special care. They preserve them from many evils, which otherwise would befall them. Ps. xci. 11, 12. They journey with them and protect them. Gen. xxviii. 12; xxxii. 1, 2. Paul experienced this. Acts xxvii. 23, 24. An angel appeared for Israel against Balaam. Num. xxii. 32. And for Elisha, against the king of Syria. 2 Kings vi. 17.

They convey positive blessings, by assisting God's servants in their undertakings; as in the case of Darius already mentioned, although he did not fear God; and in the case of Abraham's servant, for the good of his family. Gen. xxiv. 40. Also, by instructing them, as in the case of Dan. ix. 22; and Zech. i. 9. And the shepherds; Luke ii. 10; and Mary; John xx. 12; and Elijah; 2 Kings i. 15; and Hagar; Gen. xvi. 9. An angel smote Zechariah for his unbelief. Luke i. 20. And doubtless they visit God's children with diseases, to correct them for some sin they have been guilty of.

They have a great influence upon the minds of men. Evil angels can suggest evil thoughts into the mind; see the case of Judas, John xiii. 2. Also Ahab, 1 Kings xxii. 22. So also good angels influence the minds of good men: and although all good thoughts are originally from God, yet he makes use of the ministry of angels for this purpose.

They stood by good men in their afflictions, to strengthen and comfort them. It was so with our Lord in his temptation; Matt. iv. 11; and in his agony; Luke xxii. 43; also Isa. vi. 7; and with many of the martyrs in the days of popery; the angels standing by them, and quenching the violence of the fire.

Angels appear in due time to deliver them. See the case of Lot and his family, Gen. xix. 16 ; also, Dan. vi. 22 ; and Peter, Acts xii. 11 ; and the apostles, Acts v. 19.

They do not forsake good men at death, but carry them to heaven : it was so with Elijah, 2 Kings ii. 11 ; and Lazarus, Luke xvi. 22. The souls of good men pass through the devil's territory, the air, but they are safe under the convoy of angels.

They will collect all the righteous together at the great day, in order to a happy meeting with their Lord. Matt. xxiv. 31 ; xiii. 41.

They will also associate, and join with the redeemed of the Lord in celebrating the praises of God and the Lamb for ever and ever. Rev. vii. 9—12.

III. What is necessary on our part that we may enjoy the benefit of their protection ?

1. We must endeavour after an interest in Christ ; for all the angels are at his command. It is through his mediation that we obtain the benefit of their ministry. John i. 51. If we are Christ's, all things are ours, even the angels of God.

2. We must be careful to walk in the fear of the Lord ; for his angels encamp about such, says our text. This was Cornelius' character ; and while he was praying, an angel came to him, Acts x. 2, 3 ; also of Daniel, who was favoured in the same way, Dan. ix. 20, 21. See how those who feared God were preserved, Ezek. ix. 4—6.

3. Let us imitate the angels, in doing all the good we can, in every station or relation, both to the world and the church. We should strive to do the will of God on earth as the angels do in heaven.

4. Let us remember that the eyes of angels are upon us ; they witness all our actions. Eccl. v. 6. They are present at our assemblies. 1 Cor. xi. 10. Let us remember these things, and act accordingly, and we shall soon associate with them in the walks of the paradise of God. Zech. iii. 7.

THE

DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN WARFARE.

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning.—Luke xii. 35.

THIS charge was given by our blessed Saviour, who knew the importance of our duty, the dangers and difficulties that would attend us in our Christian warfare, and the shortness and uncertainty of the time that would be afforded for the performance of it. He gave it to his disciples to prepare them for their duties and sufferings ; but it is not peculiar to them, but lays an indispensable obligation upon Christians of all ages. He commanded us to have our loins girded about, in allusion to the manner of dress worn by persons that are sent upon any extraordinary business that requires immediate execution ; for they are wont to gird their garments closely about them, that they may not, by loosely flowing, hinder dispatch, and entangle them on their journey : and he commanded us to have our lights burning, because we are not aware how soon

the night will come upon us, or in what hour of the night our Lord will call us. And we shall effectually answer his gracious design, if,

I. We are always ready to do our duty. So short is the space of this mortal life, so near are we to the point of our departure, even at our entrance into it, that we ought to embrace every opportunity of performing our necessary work, as if it were the last we should ever enjoy. It should be done in the same manner as the Jews ate the passover. Ex. xii. 11.

The service that is required of us is of such mighty concernment, that we cannot make too much haste to execute it, or be too apprehensive of the danger of delay. It must be discharged immediately, like the commission that was given to one of the children of the prophets. 2 Kings ix. 1—3.

Our Saviour has represented our condition as a state of war; and every faithful soldier and servant of Christ must be disposed to do his duty, and when his conscience tells him this is expected from him, he must presently devote himself to it, and put forth all his strength, without repining, without reluctance, and without delay.

To this end he should keep himself disengaged from the things of this world, and never suffer his affections to cleave to them; for if they cleave to us, instead of running in the ways of God's commandments with delight and cheerfulness, we shall be pressed down with the clog that hangs upon us. How wretchedly did this draw back the ruler that was not far from the kingdom of heaven! Luke xviii. 22, 23.

To convince us that no pretence can justify our preferring any thing before our duty, we have two very remarkable instances set before us in the gospel. Luke ix. 59—62. What pretences could be more specious than these, to go and bury his father, and to bid farewell to his nearest relations and most affectionate friends? and yet these were not sufficient. We ought rather to follow the example of Abraham, Gen. xii. 1; and of the holy apostles, who arose and followed the blessed Jesus, as soon as he said unto them, "Follow me." Matt. ix. 9.

And, indeed, if we consider either the Master we are obliged to serve, or the nature of our service, or the inestimable rewards which he has promised, to quicken and encourage us, we cannot but rejoice to do his will, and make it our chief desire, our earnest study, our constant endeavour to please him.

He has shown his friendship to us by all the testimonies of affection, by every expression of friendship; and if we have any sense of these obligations, our hearts must leap for joy at every opportunity of acknowledging his kindness.

And the duty which he has enjoined us is such as would naturally recommend it to us, had we no regard to the person that enjoined it; for it improves and adorns our nature, is agreeable to that distinguishing faculty, our reason, and keeps that glorious lamp burning in its full brightness; and by teaching us to act like men here, it will make us wise as the angels of God hereafter; and resemble in the future state, that glorious ambassador of the Most High that came down to the prophet Daniel, who was clothed in fine linen, and whose loins were girded with fine gold. Dan. x. 5.

And the mention of our reward seems to render all other arguments needless to persuade us to our duty ; for one would think it impossible to doubt or delay, though it were but for a moment, when an eternity of perfect happiness is the end of our labours. What a mighty encouragement did Joshua give to the host of Israel ! Josh. i. 11. But how much greater encouragement have we, since, after a few fleeting years spent in this vale of sorrow, we are assured we shall enter into the heavenly Canaan, into eternal rest, and uninterrupted peace ! Shall we not, then, answer our Saviour as the sons of Reuben did Joshua ? Josh. i. 16. If we are always ready to do our duty, we shall,

II. Stand upon our guard against the devices of our adversary ; and in this again our duty resembles that of the soldier ; and our condition, like theirs, requires timely care and caution ; and God, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, has given us proper faculties for it. Our reason is capable of discerning the excellence of our duty ; and the advantages that certainly attend it ; and the heinousness of sin, and the dreadful effects that flow from it. Conscience, if we suffer it to exercise its authority, will not fail to admonish us friendly, and give us faithful intelligence of the circumstance of our state : this, under God, is our keeper and defence. Ps. cxi. 5. And thus our guardian that keepeth us will neither slumber nor sleep, unless we weaken it by repeated injuries, and are resolved to cover it with the grossest darkness.

The subtlety of the tempter renders all our vigilance necessary. He is too well acquainted with the weakness of our nature ; the easy passes by which he may gain access to our heart : he is never regardless of the proper season we are most likely to be wrought upon ; and we have a party within prone to second his endeavours, and dispose us to a compliance with him. When our thoughts are wrapt up in imaginary peace, presumptuous security, or wandering abroad, and gone from their appointed post, our treacherous affections open the gates, and let in a multitude of adversaries, and we cannot too strictly inquire to whom we give admission.

But, alas ! we are void of care, and as much addicted to pleasure, as if there were no danger ; and when it overtakes us, our whole provision is then to be made, our whole business is then to be done. But while we endeavour to rally our scattered forces together, and to recollect our impartial thoughts and just resolutions, in the time of confusion, we are entirely conquered, and fall a prey to the enemy whom we disdained to fear.

Among the number of sinners that are unhappily seduced from their duty, there are hardly any that can offer a better excuse than this childish one, they did not think of it. All that they can say of the loss of their innocence is no more than the corrupted soldiers said of the body of Jesus, they came by night, and stole it away while they slept. Matt. xxviii. 13.

That we may not for ever be deluded, we must prepare ourselves for the artful devices that will be formed against us, and the sudden assaults that will be made upon us. And since we are liable to them every moment, we must live as if every moment were the critical point, the article of danger ; and if the accursed spirit should always find us ready to

resist him, he would desist from his fruitless endeavours; for if we resist him he will flee from us. James iv. 7. And,

III. We must live in the daily exercise and practice of virtue. And in this, also, the military discipline is a proper pattern for our imitation; for the raw, inexperienced soldier is constantly trained for the day of battle; and when he is called upon to engage the enemy, he receives the charge as if he was accustomed to fight, and has no occasion to say, as David did of the weapons and armour of Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them." 1 Sam. xvii. 39. Thus must it be with us. Like the wise virgins, we must take oil with us that our lamps may have a fresh supply. But too many Christians, after their first profession, conduct themselves as if they had applied the prophecy of Elijah to themselves, and imagined that their cruise of oil should never fail. 1 Kings xvii. 14.

But, alas! if we suffer ourselves to grow supine and careless in our duty, our most shining virtues will contract rust and blemishes, and the less they are used, the more unfit for use will they grow.

And unless we go forward in the paths of virtue, it is too much to be feared we shall go back; for the same idle disposition which inclines us to stay will lay us open to the devices of our adversary.

Surely a reasonable creature, that has any regard to his own honour and interest, would wish to be found by his Saviour doing those things which he hath commanded him to do; and which recommended him to the approbation of himself, of his holy angels, and even of God, through the merits of Christ! We should often inquire, should I choose, in my present condition, to be summoned to appear before my Judge? I fear we can seldom return a satisfactory answer to such a question as this.

And in the common circumstances of our life, we are so far from being prepared for our great change, that we are hardly fit to leave our temporal affairs with decency, much less to launch forth into eternity: and were it only uncertain what our portion would be in the future state, one might conclude it very difficult to bear the doubtful prospect.

How then can we rest, as we very often do, even under a certainty of being exposed to the worst of misery? Were judgment to overtake us, it would find us as unexpected destruction did the children of Job, i. 18, 19; or rather, it would surprise us with all our sins about us, as the hand-writing upon the wall did the impious Belshazzar. Dan. v. 3—6. What horror and confusion must have seized the mighty Pharaoh when there was great cry made at midnight, that the Lord had smote all the first-born in Egypt! Ex. xii. 29, 30. But how much greater horror and confusion must fill the guilty soul that falls asleep in the midst of sinful pleasures, and awakes in endless torments!

And how happy is the man that makes his duty his first care, and effectually resolves never to leave it undone! Besides the satisfaction that flows from his innocence, he has the truest enjoyments even of the ordinary pleasures which God has allowed him in this life. He has no ill-boding fears to strike a damp upon him, but a joyful assurance that he has made the necessary preparation for the life to come; and the blessings of Providence which he enjoys, remind him of those which are infinitely better.

Whereas the man who has neglected the one thing needful, is often interrupted in his beloved pleasures with the unwelcome apprehension of future torments.

But, on the other hand, he that is provided for eternal life, is also secured against the evil day, and all the calamities of the present world; for he is supported with a well-grounded peace and assurance, having a certain hope of an abundant recompense. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

Thus the soldier not only discharges the duties of his calling, but is constantly mindful of a nobler warfare. He is pleased with the hopes of victory, and the glory of a triumph. And if it should be his lot to die in the field, he is persuaded that he shall then overcome his last enemy, and the trumpet shall no more call him forth to the hazards of an uncertain fight, but to receive the everlasting fruits of an ever-glorious victory: then shall he say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight," &c. 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

Let us, therefore, endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, &c. 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4. Since our Christian course is also compared to a race, let us so run for the prize that we may obtain. 1 Cor. ix. 24. And since our future happiness is represented as a marriage-feast, let us take care to put on the wedding-garment, and let our loins be girded about, and our lights burning, and we ourselves like men that wait for their Lord.

THE

ADVANTAGE OF AN EARLY ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE SCRIPTURES.

And from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, &c.—2 Tim. iii. 15.

IN the character of Timothy is exhibited to our view a most striking and amiable example of early piety and the power of godliness. He had received the benefit of early instruction and a good example. From the dawn of reason, he had been trained up in the knowledge and practice of religion, by his mother and grandmother, who, being persons of eminent piety themselves, would not fail to instil into his young and tender mind the instructions of truth, and to implore the blessing of God to render them effectual. So much may be inferred from the words of Paul to this excellent person. 2 Tim. i. 5.

I propose by Divine assistance,

I. To exhibit to your view the vast importance and advantage of a sound and just knowledge of the scriptures, especially when acquired in early life.

And let it be remembered, that by true scriptural knowledge, I mean not a speculative knowledge only, but that also which is the effect of divine illumination, spiritual, practical, and saving, (for both these kinds of knowledge are included in the text,) adorned the character of Timothy, and are connected with the character of every real Christian. But more particularly,

1. The importance of a true knowledge of the scriptures will appear, if we consider that they communicate information of the most important nature; information relating to the nature of God, his attributes; the trinity of persons in the Divine essence; the awful state and condition of fallen man, guilty, depraved, and subject to the curse of the law; the boundless love of God to fallen man, in the gift of his Son, to redeem a guilty world by his sufferings and death; the gift of the Spirit to enlighten and regenerate our fallen nature; the evil desert of sin; a future judgment, &c. &c.

2. The knowledge of these things could only be obtained by a divine revelation. Pious and learned men have communicated wonderful things to the world, both by preaching and writing; but whence had they their knowledge but from the pure source of unadulterated truth, the scriptures? To this source many of our modern philosophers and infidel writers owe much of their light about morality and natural religion, though they have neither the honour nor the honesty to acknowledge it. What could the light of nature have done for us, with respect to the truths above stated, and others equally important, which are connected with them? Let the heathen world, destitute of divine revelation, determine the question.

3. The knowledge of the scriptures leads to the best and noblest improvements of the faculties of the soul, and to the most refined and permanent enjoyments. Divine revelation is the noblest of all systems when impartially considered by the rational mind, even in a speculative point of view. But to a mind sayingly illumined by the Holy Spirit, its sacred contents appear with a superlative glory and beauty, and fall with such weight and influence upon the heart, as to call forth its warmest desires and affections. Ps. lxxiii. 25; cxi. cxix. cxlv. And to such a one, new sources of joy and satisfaction unfold themselves from every part of divine revelation; from the perfections of God; the doctrines and promises of the gospel; from the mediatorial glory of Christ; the fulness treasured up in him; communion with God; and from the great, refreshing, and animating prospects of glory and felicity beyond the grave, which the gospel sets before him. There these promises shall have their ultimate accomplishment. Isa. lx. 10, 20; xxxv.

4. Before I close this head of doctrine, let me observe, that all the above arguments for the beneficial consequences of acquiring religious knowledge, receive additional strength when applied to the young and rising generation. The time of childhood and youth is allowed, by universal consent, to be the best period of human life for receiving instruction. This holds good in all the sciences, and in none more so than in the science of religion, which infinitely excels all others. The mind is then sprightly and vigorous, docile and susceptible of instruction: the memory is fresh and retentive. The mind is free from worldly cares and entanglements; from a multitude of prejudices and misconceptions, which greatly obstruct the communication of knowledge in a more advanced life. Such a choice opportunity should not be neglected, but improved with the greatest avidity, by all those who are engaged in the instruction of the rising generation, especially in numerous Sunday-schools established in these kingdoms. And should this be the case,

through the divine blessing, the advantages arising to the church and the world will be incalculable. Prov. xxii. 6.

II. I shall now show how the holy scriptures are made effectual to salvation ; “able,” says the text, “to make wise unto salvation, by faith in Christ Jesus.”

1. They are sufficient to make wise unto salvation, as they discover the method of salvation, and the means whereby it may be obtained. That God should place his love upon offending man ; give his Son to die for him ; that the blessings of salvation should be treasured up in Christ ; that the Spirit of Christ should be given to apply those blessings ; that various ordinances should be appointed ; that prophets, apostles, and evangelists should be sent ; and an ordinary standing ministry should be appointed for expounding the doctrines and promises of salvation, and for inculcating all the duties of piety and holiness upon the children of men ; that all these exceed the investigation of reason, must be evident to every considerate mind. But they are clearly revealed in the scriptures of truth, which contain a perfect rule both of faith and practice.

2. To render this revelation of God’s will effectual for man’s salvation, the Holy Spirit, in his powerful agency, must concur with it. The great truths therein contained must be impressed upon the heart, and felt in their energetic and sanctifying influence, which is beyond the power of human exertion and endeavour. Appointed means are to be used, but the divine blessing is necessary to give them their proper efficacy upon the heart and life. 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. This divine agency accompanying the truths of God, quickens the dead souls of men, implants faith, and every other Christian grace.

Faith is an eminent Christian grace, and fruit of the Spirit. It is the production of the divine operation on the heart ; it interests the sinner in Christ as his Saviour, in God as his reconciled Father, in the fulness of Christ, in all the great and precious promises. It is the great recipient of every blessing ; and Christ himself is the great, immediate, and principal object of it. It is inseparably connected with salvation, and is an eminent part of it ; while unbelief leaves sinners under guilt and condemnation, and subject to the miseries of eternal death. Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 18.

3. Faith in Christ is not merely an assent of the understanding to the doctrines of scripture, although it implies it. Faith, indeed, implies the assent of the understanding, not, however, in its natural state, but as it is illumined by the Spirit of God. 2 Cor. iv. 6. By this light the mind perceives the spiritual beauty and glory of Christ, and his suitability as a Saviour, and this produces a spiritual conviction and belief of what is revealed concerning him, accompanied with cordial approbation of him, and of the whole method of grace, together with a humble dependence on him for full and free salvation. It is sometimes called a trusting in the Lord : like wisdom, “it is a tree of life to him that layeth hold of it, and blessed is every one who retaineth it.”

4. The holy scriptures make men wise unto salvation, as they are the proper object, food, and nourishment of faith, whereby it is invigorated and rendered productive of all its precious fruit. Faith cannot be

exercised without keeping in view objects congenial to its nature and exertions. Such are the great truths of revealed religion : faith realizes these great objects. It recognises the perfections of God, and looks for every advantage from them. It trusts in his power for protection ; in his love for the effects of infinite benevolence ; in his wisdom for understanding and counsel ; in his goodness for a supply of our wants ; in his mercy for the remission of sin ; in his compassion for sympathy in afflictions and temptations ; in his faithfulness for the accomplishment of his promises. When it looks at sin, it sees it exceedingly sinful. When it turns to the covenant of grace, it sees it well ordered in all things and sure. When it beholds Christ as a Redeemer, it sees a free and full salvation ; clothing for the naked, riches for the poor, &c. When it contemplates the divine promises, it brings them home by a believing application of them to the soul. When it views Jehovah as the governor of all the world, it is persuaded that every mysterious providence shall be overruled for the good of the church. Rom. viii. 28. When it looks at the divine law, it approves it as supremely excellent. When it contemplates the glory to be revealed, it fills the heart with the most triumphant joy. Rom. viii. 18.

Improvement :

1. Let us form the most honourable sentiments of the holy scriptures. Let us read and examine them, let us cherish and love them : let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding : let us live by faith in Christ Jesus, upon the doctrines and promises of the gospel, and upon the perfections of God, as they shine in the word of truth, in the person and mediation of Christ. Let us adorn our profession by a tender and close walking with God. O ! that it may never be our condemnation that " light has come into the world," &c. John iii. 19.

2. If we have shared in the invaluable blessings of the gospel ourselves, and made a full proficiency in knowledge, faith, and holiness, how solicitous should we be that others, and especially the rising generation, should share the same inestimable blessings of salvation ! This should be the concern of ministers, of parents, and other teachers, and, indeed, of all Christians, in their various stations of life, with a view to this grand end. Too much encouragement cannot be given to Sunday-schools, which are professedly designed for the instruction of youth. As to those unhappy men who may oppose such benevolent institutions, they deserve our pity.

3. Let us consider, that by living in faith and holiness ourselves, and by endeavouring to train up the rising generation in the same way, we shall, in the best and most effectual manner, oppose the fatal and pernicious growth of infidelity, error, and immorality. As we are strictly bound by divine authority to do all in our power for promoting the glory of God, the interest of truth, and the good of mankind, during the short period of human life, let us, in an humble dependence on divine grace, rouse ourselves to a holy and vigorous activity in the prosecution of these important objects. With incessant and earnest care, let us instil into the minds of the young the knowledge of God, and of our Sa-

viour Jesus Christ, as the best way to transmit the truth in purity and power to generations yet unborn, that so God may have a seed to serve him while sun and moon endure.

THE CHARACTER AND WORK OF JESUS CHRIST.

And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?—Matt. xxi. 10.

WHEN any person of a singular character, and who is represented as having done some remarkable works, makes his appearance in any age or country, he usually engages the attention of mankind. If he has achieved some great thing for the good of the human race, or of his country, he readily becomes an object of admiration, and receives the applause of the multitude; many of whom perhaps will afterwards, from various considerations, commence his enemies and persecute him with a hatred and rancour equal if not superior, to their former admiration and applause: so variable are the tempers of men, and of so little importance are their professed admiration and regard. This was evidently the character and behaviour of that multitude, who followed our Saviour in his progress to Jerusalem. “And when he was come into Jerusalem,” &c. It is intended by Divine assistance,

To suggest several answers to this question, put by the people of Jerusalem concerning Jesus Christ.

1. Who is this? He is the glorious Personage who was typified and promised to the church as the true Messiah and the Saviour of sinners. He is the great antitype of all the typical persons, places, and things, appointed to prefigure him under the Old Testament. He was promised as the woman's seed. Gen. iii. 15. As Abraham's. Gen. xii. 3. In the character of Shiloh. Gen. xlix. 10. In his prophetic character he was foretold by Moses. Deut. xviii. 15. He was to be of the family of David. Jer. xxiii. 5. He was to be born of a virgin. Isa. vii. 14. Bethlehem was foretold as the place of his birth. Micah v. 2. It was foretold that he was to perform wonderful works. Isa. xlii. 7; xxxv. 5, 6. Had the Jewish nation paid proper attention to these things, they would not have rejected Christ, but hailed him as the true Messiah.

2. Who is this? He is a person of infinite dignity, the only-begotten and eternal Son of God. John i. 14—18; iii. 16. He is the Son of God, as begotten by the Spirit of God. Luke i. 35. As being raised immediately from the dead by God. Acts xiii. 33. It is so said of others, much more so of Christ. Luke xx. 36. In his resurrection he was declared to be such; and as being made heir of all things in his Father's house. Heb. i. 4, 5. But more especially, he is the only-begotten Son of God by nature, of the same essence with his Father, the eternal Son of God, who, when he became incarnate, came forth from the Father; John xvi. 27, 28; who was before Abraham; John viii. 58; who preached to the antediluvians; 1 Pet. iii. 18—20; who made the world.

John i. 10 ; Col. i. 16—18. And is God. Heb. iii. 4. God manifest in the flesh. 1 Tim. iii. 16. Possessing all the perfections of God, "is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person."

3. Who is this? He is the only Mediator between God and man. 1 Tim. ii. 5. Man in his primitive innocence required no mediator; but when mansinned, a mediator was essentially necessary, to interpose between an offended God and offending sinners. No angel was equal to the arduous undertaking; the Son of God, alone, was found equal to the work; hence the Father in his infinite wisdom and love appointed him to the service. Ps. lxxxix. 19.

4. Who is this? He is Head of the church by the Father's appointment. Ps. ii. 6; Luke i. 32, 33; Eph. i. 22, 23. He is her head, as it respects representation, being the second Adam, the first being the figure of him who was to come. Of government, as her King and Lawgiver, the scriptures being the great standing statute-book of his kingdom; which none must add to or diminish, at the peril of his salvation. Of saving influence, and the fountain of spiritual life to all her members. And of example; 1 Pet. ii. 21.

5. Who is this? He is that glorious personage to whom the whole administrations of Divine Providence are committed. He is the Governor of the world. The Father has put all things under his care and management. He moves and directs the whole frame of nature; he directs the motions and propensities of his creatures, so as to render them subservient to his will. He appoints and conducts all the changes and revolutions of empires, raises some and depresses others. He sits invisible at the helm of the great providential dispensations and tremendous scenes of Providence which appear in our own day, and will bring glory to his name, good to his church, and destruction to his enemies out of them all. We may exclaim here, with Paul, on another occasion, "O the depth," &c. Rom. xi. 33.

6. Who is this? He is the dignified and glorious Person, who is appointed by Jehovah the Father to be the Judge of the world, and to pass the decisive and unalterable sentence, which will fix the conditions of all mankind through eternity. John v. 22; Acts xvii. 31; Rom. xiv. 10; Rev. xx. 12. Jesus will then appear in circumstances of awful and tremendous majesty. The whole race of mankind will be assembled at his tribunal, from hoary Adam to his youngest son. He will possess a perfect knowledge of all characters and causes which will come before him, whether good or bad, and the final sentence will proceed accordingly. Oh! what a dreadful day will that be to the wicked, and how terrible their sentence! Matt. xxv. 41. But what an auspicious and joyful day to the righteous! They will lift up their hands with joy to hear their gracious welcome to the Lord. Matt. xxv. 34.

7. Who is this? It is he who is appointed to be the blessed medium through which the happiness of the redeemed will come into their possession to eternity. In the state of primitive innocence, all blessings flowed immediately from God, in the channel of absolute love and goodness; but this channel of communication was shut up by sin; and after the introduction of moral evil, Jehovah could hold no gracious intercourse with man but through a mediator. It is in this way, and in

this only, that all the blessings of grace and glory can be obtained by them who believe. Of this David says, "this is all my salvation, and all my desire." And Paul says to believers, "ye are complete in him; for, in him all fulness dwells; and, my God shall supply all your wants, according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ." And the burden of the song of the redeemed will be, "unto him that loved us," &c. Rev. i. 5, 6.

The improvement:

1. How great and wonderful are the love and wisdom of God displayed in the scheme of redemption! Hence it is called, "the wisdom of God in a mystery;" and, "the manifold wisdom of God."

2. How inexcusable are all those who reject the Redeemer, and despise the great salvation set before them in the word of God, and the preaching of the glorious gospel! Such, particularly, are all infidels, who reject the gospel revelation; all worldly professors, who love their farms and merchandise above God and the word of truth. Matt. vii. 21.

3. Let Christians daily implore the Redeemer by faith in his mediatorial character and offices. Believe on him, trust in him, depend on him, as made of God unto them wisdom, &c. 1 Cor. i. 30.

4. Dwell much on the glorious excellency of Christ, and on the work he has performed, and will still perform for you, and for his whole church. In your serious contemplations, often put the question to yourselves, "Who is this?" and study to consult suitable answers, according to the information already given. This is he, "who is the eternal Son of God, who hath loved me, and given himself for me," &c. &c Gal. ii. 20.

5. Amidst the present convulsions of the nations, console your minds with the reflection, that Jesus is the Governor of the nations; and that he will order all things for the good of his church; and he himself "will be a wall of fire round about her, and the glory in the midst." Zech. ii. 5.

6. In an age like the present, when error, infidelity, and every vice abound, let me direct you, O believer, to stand fast in the faith and holiness of the gospel. "Contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." Live down all reproaches and aspersions cast upon your character or religion, by the most exemplary purity and godliness: "For this is the will of God your Saviour, that by well-doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as ye know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." 1 Cor. xv. 58.

THE CHRISTIAN'S DESIRE TO SEE GOD'S GLORY.

And he said, I beseech thee show me thy glory.—Ex. xxxiii. 18.

THESE are the words of Moses, a man singularly favoured of God, by the manifestation of himself he made to him; and still desiring to be more so, here expresses that desire in prayer to him. Perhaps he might desire too much; more than he in his present state could bear; and so

far his request was denied. Ver. 22. The request that Moses here makes, as duly regulated, is graciously answered. Ver. 19. By his goodness, is there meant his glory; as the LXX render it, "I will pass before thee with my glory;" thou shalt have a transient view of it, but the full discovery is reserved for a future state: and how this matter was to be conducted, see in verses 21, &c. Doubtless, a great deal of God, and his goodness, is to be seen and known on earth; but far, very far short of what will be enjoyed in heaven; and the more of his goodness we experience here, the more insatiable is our desire after more.

By Divine assistance I shall consider,

I. What is meant by God's glory, which the Christian desires to see.

1. It is glory, in his gracious conduct to sinners, in and through his Son. Any other discovery of God would be dreadful and terrifying, and instead of desiring it, he would deprecate it. "God is a consuming fire," and, as such, inaccessible without Christ. 1 Tim. vi. 16. But Jesus has revealed him in the most amiable and endearing manner; John i. 18; in this way his glorious goodness is abundant. Ex. xxxiv. 6. It is in his wounds that we are secured from flaming wrath. Through him it is that the glory of God shines, not with a destroying but reviving light; and only as standing within this rock, we are able with comfort to behold it.

2. It is his glory, as manifested to his soul in pardoning mercy and love. It is pleasing to the Christian to see the glory of God's goodness, in reconciling the world to himself by the death of his Son; 2 Cor. v. 19; but much more satisfactory for him to see the glory of God, as revealed to his own soul, so as to be able to say with Paul, "In whom we have redemption," &c. Eph. i. 7. This is his abundant goodness, as expressed Ex. xxxiv. 7. It is called the secret of the Lord. Job xxix. 4. Prov. iii. 32.

3. It is his glory, as manifested to the soul, making him a partaker of the Divine nature. 2 Pet. i. 4. Improving and increasing. 2 Cor. iii. 18. This is called the mind of Christ. Phil. ii. 5; and the Spirit of Christ. Rom. viii. 9. It is called the beauty of the saints. Ps. xlv. 11; and it is that salvation with which God beautifies the meek; Ps. cxlix. 4; and by which they are prepared to see his glory in heaven. Matt. v. 8.

II. Where does the real Christian wish to see the glory of God?

1. In all his ordinances in this world, especially in the assembly of his saints. There God has promised to be. Ex. xx. 24. There he gives the most glorious communications of himself; and after these the Psalmist expresses the most vehement desire. Ps. xlii. 1, 2. He there alludes to the assemblies of his people, as he explains it, Ps. xxvii. 4; and again, Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2. How much of the glory of his perfections is seen in his sanctuary! particularly in prayer and praise, when the hearts of his saints are warmed, enlarged, and raised to himself, while he supplies them with fresh strength, life and comfort. And when his word is read, opened, and applied, what impressions are made! what effects are produced! How much of his glory has been displayed in this way!

But the glory of God, in his perfections, eminently shines in the ordinance of the Lord's Supper; where Jesus Christ is eminently set forth as crucified before our eyes, suffering, bleeding, and dying in our room and stead.

2. Much of God's glory is here to be seen. The glory of his wisdom, in devising the wonderful scheme of man's redemption, so as the seeming contrary pleas of his attributes might be adjusted, sin punished, the law magnified and made honourable, and yet the rebel pardoned. And when none else could, God himself found a ransom, appointing his own Son, in our nature, by dying, to become our Saviour: "Wherein," &c. Eph. i. 8. And seeing this, in the commemoration of his death, believers have been made to cry out, "O the depth," &c. Rom. xi. 33.

3. How glorious is the discovery here made of his justice and holiness, in the satisfaction made for sin by the voluntary death even of God's own beloved Son, to make way for sinners being pardoned and saved. And, considering who he was, and what he bare, and how he was treated, that we might be spared; the ruin of the offending angels, the drowning of the old world, the burning of Sodom, and the punishment of sinners in hell for ever, do not altogether show forth the justice and holiness of God, like the sufferings and death of Christ, on the account of lost sinners.

4. Here Divine grace is to be seen in its brightest lustre. In its freeness without our merit, and against the highest provocation. In its condescension, in resolving to save us, however unworthy. In its sovereignty, passing by angels, and providing a Saviour for man. In its riches, as extending to all mankind. John iii. 16.

5. Here is displayed the glory of God's faithfulness to his promises; in his being present in his ordinances, giving his people fresh light, strength, and comfort: and thus, in a sensible way, renewing his covenant with them, and assuring them that all the blessings of it are theirs.

6. The Christian desires to see the glory of God above. Phil. i. 23; 2 Cor. v. 1, 2. The glory of the Lord sometimes fills his house and his ordinances here below, which believers are admitted to see, to their comfort and joy; but this is only preparatory to the inconceivably greater displays that will be made in heaven, which they expect and earnestly desire. 1 John iii. 2. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

III. Why does the Christian desire to see his glory?

He desires to see it in his ordinances here,

1. Because the glory of God is transforming. The more he sees God in the manner described, the more he shall be like him. Some rays, as it were, were left upon him; and the disciples were so much raised above themselves, that it was remarked, "they have been with Jesus." Acts. iv. 13.

2. The glory of God, thus shown to the Christian, is most reviving. Not any thing in this world can give that comfort to the soul, which the manifestation of God can do. Ps. iv. 7.

And the Christian wishes to see this glory in heaven,

1. Because it will be most clear and full. The manifestations which God will make of himself above, if communicated here, would dissolve our present frame: we could not see his face and live. Here, "his loving kindness is better than life." What then will it be when manifested in heaven?

2. The glory to be revealed above will be most satisfying. It is called

a fulness of joy and pleasure for ever; Ps. xvi. 11; and this David speaks of, as what he desired above every other thing. Ps. xvii. 15.

3. The manifestations of this glory in heaven will be permanent and everlasting. The glory of God will be eternally open, and the saints shall eternally behold it, and that with the highest delight, without interruption and without end. Dan. vii. 18.

Lastly, let us pray for it. And thus express our desires after it, for desire is the very life and soul of prayer: and those desires should be expressed to God who alone can show us his glory. And those desires should be expressed, especially in the assemblies of the saints, and with uncommon vehemence of desire, saying, "O Lord, I beseech thee, show me thy glory." And thus we shall express the high value we put upon it, and may reasonably expect a favourable answer. And to our prayers for clear manifestations of his glory, let us add our praises for those which we have already received: and thus begin the work of heaven while we are upon earth, in the hope of dwelling with God in heaven, to behold his glory for ever.

CHRIST'S DYING REQUEST FOR HIS DISCIPLES.

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, &c.

John xvii. 15.

In this chapter we have the heavenly prayer of our Lord, put up a little before his ascension into heaven. The design of it is to support and comfort his disciples, whom he should leave behind. Ver. 13. Though he was going to enter upon his last and greatest sufferings, he graciously provides for their peace and joy. He knew that they valued nothing more than his presence with them; he perceived their rising grief, and saw the standing tears in their eyes, at the heavy news of his departure from them; and he knew that where he was going, they could not presently follow him, but must stay a considerable time behind, in a wicked world; wherefore, to calm and allay their sorrows, he leaves them many reviving cordials; among which, this in the text is a very suitable and comprehensive one, "I pray not," &c.

I shall endeavour, by Divine aid, to show,

I. From what evil believers shall be kept.

1. This preservation does not extend to an absolute freedom from pain and affliction. Sin, the moral evil, let in a flood of natural evil upon the world. Good men have their share of it; Heb. xii. 6; and it is designed to profit them. Verse 10.

2. Nor does it exclude all suffering for the sake of righteousness. This was foretold by Christ; John xvi. 33; and the reason is given, chap. xv. 19.

3. Nor is it to be understood as a full discharge from Satan's temptations. Their Christian armour will be necessary through life; see the reason of it, Eph. vi. 12. And some who have been dear to God, have been particularly tried in this way. 2 Cor. xii. 7.

4. Nor is it to be understood of being kept from death. Believers are under the same law of mortality with other men; Gen. iii. 19; which law is ratified; Heb. ix. 27; after the promise of the Messiah given. Gen. iii. 15. Therefore it was not the design of Christ's death, nor of his prayer in the text, to procure a deliverance from it.

But if saints are to die as well as others, some may inquire, how it comes to pass that they are not immediately, upon their conversion, taken to heaven? The reasons may be as follow:

1. God orders it thus for his own glory. His dominion over us, and propriety in us, and right to rule us, is thus made known. He will have a people in the world to worship, adore, praise, honour, and adhere to him. What a wretched world would it be, if there were none of this description in it!

2. By ordering it thus, he endears Jesus Christ to them, by teaching them, from a sense of their wants, &c. to value and esteem his merits and intercession; and thus he brings them to "honour the Son, as they honour the Father."

3. He continues them in the world, that they may be instrumental in saving souls, by bringing poor sinners to himself. And how content should they be to stay on earth for a season, that they may help to people heaven!

4. They are to have a time in which to run the race set before them, and be conformed to the example of Christ, and follow him in the same way he went to glory. Thus runs the promise: "To him that overcometh," &c. Rev. iii. 21.

5. Hereby God will try the sincerity and strength of their graces. Of their faith and trust in him, and of their devotedness and love to him.

6. In this way he excites their desires after heaven. And this will abundantly sweeten it to them, that after a sorrowful life and painful death, they enter into the possession of it.

7. The saints' rest is sure, though for a time it be deferred. They are set to work in the vineyard only till evening. See what he says of them, John xvii. 24.

8. Should the time of their stay on earth be longer, if they continue faithful and diligent, their glory will be the greater; and the everlasting rest will be a full recompense for all their former labour and suffering.

But what evils shall believers be kept from?

1. From all damning error and delusion. David's confession holds good as to every saint. Ps. xvi. 11. They have the unction of the Holy One for this end; 1 John ii. 20; and to this end was the Spirit promised. John xvi. 13.

2. They shall be kept from the tyranny of Satan; though not from his temptations, yet from his tyranny. John viii. 36. They shall be kept from temptations superior to their strength, or have more strength given them answerable to their trials. 1 Cor. x. 13.

3. They shall be kept from sinking under the burthen of their afflictions. Isa. xliii. 1, 2.

4. They shall be kept from the dominion of sin. Rom. viii. 2, 6—14.

5. They shall be kept from the curse and condemnation of the law; being in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation to them. Rom. viii. 1.

6. They shall be kept from the fear of death ; and finally obtain a glorious victory over him. 1 Cor. xv. 55, &c.

II. What assurance there is, from the prayer of our Lord, that believers shall be thus kept. A variety of considerations may confirm our faith herein ; as,

1. That of the person praying. Our great High Priest, the Son of God, Saviour of men, perfectly holy ; in whom the Father is always well pleased, whom he always hears.

2. What he asks for, and on what ground ?

His request is for the preservation of his people, in order to their eternal happiness ; which is perfectly agreeable to the will of God and the end for which he was sent by him into the world. John vi. 39. Besides, he asks for no more than by his meritorious sufferings he hath the fullest right to, which shall never be denied him.

3. The person to whom his request is directed.

The God of all grace, full of compassion, and who, as an instance of it, spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all ; and how shall he not with him also, for his sake, and at his desire, freely give us all things ?

4. The persons for whom he intercedes. His children, who have a special interest in him, and bear a peculiar love to him.

I shall now apply the subject ; and,

1. Hence learn the greatness and constancy of Christ's love to his people, and his desire of their eternal blessedness with himself. This is the affection with which he lived and died, and which he carried to heaven with him, that he might continually appear in the presence of God for us.

2. What a powerful argument should it be with all, to come to Christ ! Who would live a day in the world, without having an interest in this prayer of his, of being kept from the evil ?

3. It may strengthen the faith of real Christians, in their daily prayers for deliverance from evil, that it is the same request their Lord has made for them.

4. How much is the world mistaken as to Christ's servants, as if they were the most miserable persons in it ; when the Lord hath so fully provided for their safety and happiness, both in this world and in that which is to come.

5. How inexcusable must it be to forsake Christ and his service, for fear of suffering ! He that would save his life, by running from the Lord of life, takes the direct way to lose it.

Lastly, Let this encourage us cheerfully to follow the Captain of our salvation whilst we live, and to commit our souls to him when we die. Having God on our side, to keep us from evil, if we belong to Christ, what need we fear what man can do unto us ? He that cannot trust God, cannot trust any thing. Whatever discouragements you meet with, hold on your way ; in his hands you are safe. Whenever you are inclined to faint, remember, "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world ;" and then expect the glorious conclusion according to 2 Tim. iv. 18.

GOD'S DARK DISPENSATIONS TO HIS SAINTS.

And Jacob their father said unto them, &c.—Gen. xlii. 36.

THESE are the words of Jacob, in great perplexity and distress; the occasion of which we are acquainted with in the foregoing verses of this chapter. He concluded Joseph to be dead, and looked upon Simeon as lost; in both which he was mistaken: and the thoughts of parting with Benjamin cut him to the heart, as if it were to send him to the grave: and therefore he cries out, "All these things are against me." But Joseph was safe in honour, Benjamin would be so too, and well received; Simeon would be set at liberty, all the family would be kindly entertained, and the father sent for to be nourished by his beloved son; and thus all was making for his comfort and advantage, that appeared so black and dismal, and whence he expected nothing but ruin. And, as Jacob's is not a singular case, I shall endeavour,

I. To show God's dealings with his people, even when he is working their deliverance, and designs their good, are often dark and intricate.

1. This was the case with Jacob. God designed the preservation of him and his family in Egypt, by Joseph's advancement there; but how unlikely the means he made use of in order to it, and yet how wonderfully was the end proposed accomplished!

2. Thus it was with the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, four hundred and thirty years after. They were exceedingly oppressed by Pharaoh. See the complaints of the people to Moses and Aaron; Ex. v. 21; and the complaint of Moses before the Lord, on the same occasion; verses 22, 23; and after they were brought a little on their way out of Egypt, their danger was increased. Chap. xiv. 8, 9. The pursuing army was behind, the sea before, on either hand mountains that forbade their flight or escape; to all appearance, every thing was working towards their destruction; and yet this was the way that God took to accomplish their deliverance, by opening the sea to give them passage, and drowning their enemies, who ventured to follow them. Verses 26—28.

3. Thus it was with Daniel and the three Hebrew worthies. God resolved to deliver and save them; but the way in which he chose to do it, was by suffering the first to be cast into the lions' den, and the others into the fiery furnace, and yet by keeping them unhurt, to the confusion of their enemies.

4. David was designed for a throne, and anointed to it: but, before he reached it, he was driven from place to place, as a partridge upon the mountains; and reduced to that distress, that he seemed to conclude his case desperate, and his destruction certain. 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

5. Such also were God's dealings with Job; he resolves to bless Job's latter end more than his beginning; but how unlikely a way to this, to be stripped of all, and reduced to the deepest distress; to be plundered by his enemies, censured by his friends, Satan let loose in the sorest manner to afflict him, and God writing bitter things against him!

Who could have thought, that saw him in his low condition, that the issue would have been so bright and blessed?

Thus God's dealings with his servants have often a sad aspect, as if he were set on their destruction, when he is consulting their truest advantage, and promoting their salvation. Verily he is a God that hideth himself, when he is at the same time the God of Israel, the Saviour. Wraps himself in clouds and darkness, before he shines through to their comfort. But this leads me to consider,

II. Whence it is that a child of God may be ready to conclude that to be against him, which is really for him.

1. This proceeds from their weakness of faith, as to God's wisdom and power, faithfulness and love. We are slow of heart to believe, that he is able to bring good out of evil, and light out of darkness; that he hath hidden designs to serve by all his dealings with his servants, which he knows how to bring about, and will not fail to do in the appointed way and time, which are always to be left to him, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

2. By looking to Providence, and losing sight of the promise. Rom. viii. 28.

3. Judging by sense. When afflicted and pained, we are apt to feel and complain, that "all these things are against us;" but faith speaks in a very different language. Ps. lxxiii. 1.

4. By looking down to the present world, and our interest in it. When this is chiefly regarded, that which tends to lessen our comforts in it may be thought to make against us; but that which is contrary to our temporal welfare may promote our everlasting happiness.

5. Through rashness; viewing only a part of his work, and not waiting for the issue. Jacob, who cried out so passionately, "all these things are against me," in the end discovered his mistake.

6. Through not attending to the usual method of God's dealing with his people, and our own, and others' experience of the happy purposes he has served by it. He makes rich, by first making poor: he heals by wounding and making them sick: he quickens in the way to heaven, and better prepares them for it, by all the sufferings of the present life. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

III. The grounds upon which we may conclude that what the Christian apprehends to be against him, shall in the end terminate in his favour.

1. From God's relation to him: God is his father; Rom. viii. 15; and is particularly concerned for his good and happiness, even in affliction and distress. Heb. xii. 10.

2. From God's love to him. See his language to his people; Isa. xliii. 4; and this love will engage all his perfections for them.

3. From his express promises. Rom. viii. 28. Things shall have a better issue than they expected. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," and there be safe from fear of evil. Isa. xl. 1, 2.

IV. Why is it that the Lord chooses this way to promote the best interest of his followers?

That he really does so, is clear from Jacob's case; and what we

sometimes think to be a judgment, is a mercy. The fish that swallowed Jonah, was a mean to bring him to shore. This way the Lord chooses,

1. For his own glory, as appears from the case of Lazarus. John xi. 4.
2. To discover their corruption, and to try their graces. Deut. viii. 2.
3. To quicken and make them more earnest in prayer. The more dark his dispensations are, the more fervent and enlarged we should be in prayer.

4. To sweeten and endear the mercy he grants them, after all their fears and doubting to the contrary.

5. To heighten their thanksgiving for the mercy bestowed. How thankful must Jacob have been, after all his difficulties, to find his children all alive and well. How was the thanksgiving of Israel enlarged, upon their deliverance from danger at the Red Sea! It produced the song, Ex. xv.

Application :

1. Let us be anxiously careful to assure ourselves, as to our special relation to God, as his children in covenant with him, devoted to his service.

2. Let us be aware of judging God's purposes of grace by the external dispensations which make way to bring them into effect. The promise is often just about to be fulfilled, when, to an eye of sense, it seems at the greatest distance. In the evening-time, when least expected, it shall be light. Wherefore,

3. Beg that faith may not fail, when surrounding circumstances seem dark and dismal. In every place he can come to us, and in the deepest distress he can relieve us. Isa. xli. 10.

4. Beware of entertaining narrow thoughts of God in the deepest distress. Believe him always the same whatever changes you meet with.

Lastly, While you are apt to say on earth, "all these things are against me," press on with greater earnestness to heaven. There all your tears shall be wiped away; and there you shall have "fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore."

THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPH

IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH.

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, &c.—2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

THESE are the words of St. Paul concerning himself, while he was a prisoner at Rome, and when his mind was impressed with the idea of an approaching martyrdom for the sake of Christ: but his pious and great mind was fully prepared to meet it. Verse 6. In this very awful situation he reflects upon the past circumstances of his life, and takes a survey of the future. The words of the text are the result of the inquiry: "I have fought a good fight," &c. We shall consider the import of the declaration,

1. He had fought a good fight. The Christian's life is represented as a military life. 1 Tim. vi. 12. 2 Tim. ii. 3.

His enemies are numerous and powerful. Eph. vi. 12. Watchfulness is essentially necessary. Matt. xxvi. 41. 1 Cor. xvi. 13; the heart must be watched; Prov. iv. 23; the world, with its pernicious smiles and snares, and opposition; John xv. 18—20; our invisible adversary, called in scripture a roaring lion, 1 Pet. v. 8; a great red dragon, Rev. xii. 3; a serpent, Rev. xii. 9; the devil, or accuser, 1 Pet. v. 8.

The Christian must look to his Leader and Captain. Heb. ii. 10. He has already conquered them; Col. ii. 15; and will make the Christian more than a conqueror. Rom. viii. 37.

A sufficiency of armour is provided for the Christian warrior. It is described by St. Paul. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. Eph. vi. 14—18; and recommends the putting it on. Verses 11, 13.

This armour must be used to the last. 1 Kings xx. 11. In which case the victory is certain, Heb. xi. 34, and the reward sure. Rev. ii. 10.

The apostle calls this conflict "a good fight."

It is in the cause of a good God, good to all. Ps. cxlv. 9.

It is in the cause of truth and holiness.

It is a conflict maintained against the enemies of our Lord and his kingdom.

And is in order to an everlasting good; eternal life. 1 Tim. vi. 12.

2. He had finished his course.

The Christian's life is here compared to a race.

Reference is here had to the Olympic games.

Also in 1 Cor. ix. 25.

In this race every man may run. Heb. ii. 9.

Not only one may obtain the prize, but all.

The prize is not a corruptible, but an incorruptible crown. 1 Cor. ix. 25.

All who run faithfully are sure of the prize. Verse 26.

The danger of turning back is great. Verse 27.

The course for the Christian racer is the path of holy obedience; Ps. cxix. 59; which was holy David's delight. Verses 14 and 24.

The apostle's conduct is worthy of imitation. Phil. iii. 14.

The conduct of the foolish Galatians should be a warning to others. Gal. v. 7.

3. He had kept the faith.

The apostle may refer to the doctrines of faith in general; but that of the atonement made for sin, by the blood of Christ, particularly.

This is the only foundation of a sinner's hope. 2 Cor. iii. 11.

In this St. Paul glories. Gal. vi. 14.

It was the great subject of his preaching. 1 Cor. ii. 2.

Those who lay the foundation, and build upon it doctrines inimical to the scriptures, shall be saved with great difficulty. 1 Cor. iii. 12—15.

Those who neglect or reject it, their damnation is sure. Heb. ii. 3; x. 26.

He may also allude to the doctrine of justification by faith.

We are justified by works before men. James ii. 24.

And shall be justified in the same way at the day of judgment. Matt. xii. 37.

But can only be justified by faith alone in the hour of conversion. Rom. iii. 20, 28. Acts xiii. 38, 39.

Or, he may refer to the grace of faith.

It is a divine principle in the soul, and is called the gift of God, it being the effect of God's operation on the soul. Eph. ii. 8.

And is a gracious habit; a continual exercise in those who live a life of righteousness. Gal. ii. 20.

It ascertains the reality of spiritual and eternal things. Heb. ii. 1.

It unites the soul to Jesus Christ, its grand object. Eph. iii. 17.

St. Stephen was a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. Acts vi. 5.

Those who possess it can perform wonders. Heb. xi. 33, 34.

It is attended with the evidence of our interest in Christ, and peculiar relation to God as his children. 1 John v. 10.

This faith the apostle had received, and faithfully kept to the last: "I have kept the faith."

His conduct in this particular, forms a grand contrast to the conduct of the unhappy persons mentioned, 1 Tim. i. 19.

Consider,

II. The views and expectations of the apostle relative to a future state.

1. He expected to receive a crown in the eternal world; called in scripture, a crown of life. James i. 12.

A crown of glory that fadeth not away. 1 Pet. v. 4.

It is promised to those who are faithful unto death. Rev. ii. 10.

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. Rev. xix. 16.

He has many crowns upon his own head. Rev. xix. 12.

And many crowns to bestow upon his followers, who shall shine with him in glory. Matt. xiii. 43.

And he shall make them kings and priests unto God and his Father, for ever. Rev. i. 6.

2. This crown is here called a crown of righteousness.

It was procured for man by the spotless, righteous sacrifice of Christ. Heb. ix. 12.

It will be given only to those who are righteous in the sight of God; who are justified and sanctified by faith in Christ Jesus. Heb. xiii. 12.

It will be given as the reward of righteousness. Matt. x. 41. Called a great reward, Matt. v. 12; and the Christian shall not lose it. Mark ix. 41.

And it will be given as an act of righteousness on the part of God the Father. He will thereby evince and declare his faithfulness to his Son, who laid down his life to purchase this crown, and unto the faithful followers of Christ, unto whom it is promised; he is truth itself, and cannot lie.

3. This crown is laid up for the Christian.

While in this world he is an heir to it. Rom. viii. 17.

The full enjoyment of it is reserved in heaven for him. 1 Pet. i. 4.

He has frequent earnestings of it. Eph. i. 14.

4. The Christian expects to receive this crown from the Lord, as his righteous Judge.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. Acts x. 36.

He shall judge both quick and dead. Verse 42.

It is so appointed, to secure to him his proper revenue of glory. John v. 22.

St. Paul looked forward to that period with the highest exultation,

and expected to receive the crown from his righteous Judge, as one who, in a gospel sense, was worthy of it. Rev. iii. 4.

5. He expected to receive the crown at that day.

The day of his death; when the Christian goes to paradise, Luke xxiii. 43, and is present with the Lord. 2 Cor. v. 8.

The day of judgment; when the full reward shall be given, and eternal glory be the inheritance of the Christian, in soul and body. Phil. iii. 21. 1 Cor. xv. 42—44.

6. The apostle exults at the prospect, not only of receiving a crown of glory himself; but anticipates, with the most exalted pleasure, the numberless crowns which shall be given to all those who love his appearing.

The Christian spirit is not a selfish spirit; he rejoices in the prosperity of others. He knows that in his Father's house there are many mansions. John xiv. 2.

And that he can supply the wants of all to all eternity. Rev. vii. 17.

Improvement:

1. How awful is the state of those who are of a different character, and whose conduct is the reverse of that which we have been describing! They are not fighting "the good fight of faith;" but fighting against God, against Christ, against the influences of the Spirit, against the kind offices of good angels, the good wishes of good men, against their own mercies, against their own souls.

Nor are they finishing their course in the way to heaven; but are running quite away from it. Rom. iii. 17. In the way that leads to eternal destruction. Verse 16. Isa. lix. 7, 8.

Nor have they kept the faith, but are altogether destitute of it, 2 Thess. iii. 2; and are even opposed to it, Ps. xiv. 1.

2. Their prospects, as to a future state, are by no means cheering and consolatory; but gloomy, dark, and dismal.

They can expect no crown of righteousness, but eternal misery. Ps. ix. 17.

Sentence will be pronounced, and the punishment inflicted by the righteous Judge. Matt. xxv. 41. Rev. vi. 16, 17.

And this will be the reward of their own unrighteousness, their own wickedness, their own unbelief; for not believing that Christ was their Saviour, that he died for them. Such are condemned already for their unbelief, John iii. 18; and shall be damned at last, should they die in it. Mark xvi. 16.

It is not, however, the will of God, that any of the human race should perish. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. 1 Tim. ii. 4.

He has given his own dear Son, with a view to prevent the sinner's ruin. John iii. 17.

The Most High invites sinners, in the most tender and affectionate manner, to come to him, through his Son, for salvation. Isa. lv. 7.

In all these professions of regard he is sincere, and complains of their obstinacy. John v. 40.

If sinners will but return, they may expect the most favourable reception. See the case of the returning prodigal, Luke xv. 11, &c. which, in the most engaging and affecting manner, illustrates the Divine conduct to returning sinners.

THE NATURE OF REMISSION OF SIN.

In whom we have redemption through his blood, &c.—Eph. i. 7.

VARIOUS are the views given us in the scriptures of the great Messiah, the Christ of God.

He is represented as the great Prophet and Teacher of mankind. Deut. xviii. 15, 18.

As our great High Priest. Heb. ii. 17; iv. 14.

As universal King and Governor. Isa. ix. 6, 7.

As the Redeemer of the world. Job xix. 25.

Our Intercessor with the Father. 1 John ii. 1.

Our great Forerunner. Heb. vi. 20.

And as the grand channel of communication from God the Father to man, and from man to God. John xiv. 6. Also the text, "We have redemption through his blood," &c. We shall consider,

I. The blessing of forgiveness of sin, which is one of the most prominent features of the gospel of Christ; and,

1. It is necessary for all men. Rom. iii. 23.

The necessity of forgiveness originates in man's guilt. Rom. iii. 18.

All are naturally unbelievers. Rom. xi. 32.

All have sinned. Rom. iii. 23.

And, consequently, all are guilty. Rom. iii. 19.

This must be known so as to be felt.

And so produce the liveliest sensations of distress. Joel ii. 12. Ps. vi. 6, 7.

And the most fervent applications for mercy. Luke xviii. 13.

2. If we would obtain this forgiveness, we must go to God for it.

It is his law that we have broken.

It is his authority that we have rejected.

It is his honour that we have insulted.

It is his goodness that we have despised. Rom. ii. 4.

It is his mercies that we have abused.

And his bleeding, dying love, that we have slighted.

To God, therefore, we must make confession. Ps. xxxii. 5. 1 John i. 9.

To God we must pray for forgiveness. Ps. xxv. 11.

From God alone we must expect to receive it. Micah vii. 18.

No mere man can forgive sin.

But Jesus Christ can, and does forgive sin. Matt. ix. 2.

And hence he is God. Col. i. 14—17.

And is exalted for this very purpose. Acts. v. 31.

Let sensible, guilty sinners make the trial, and they will prove the truth of his promise. Matt. xi. 28.

3. We must be willing to receive forgiveness in God's own way, according to the terms of his gospel.

We are not to expect to receive it for the sake of any thing we have done or suffered.

Or for any thing that we have sacrificed for Christ.

But for Christ's sake who died for our sins. 1 Pet. iii. 18.

Man, however, is not altogether passive in the great work of salvation; for he is required,

To repent of his sins. Acts iii. 19.

To confess his sins. 1 John i. 9.

To forsake the practice of them. Isa. lv. 7.

To pray for forgiveness. Ps. xxv. 11.

And to believe in Christ, in order to it. Rom. iii. 25.

Not any one, nor all of these acts together, merit the blessing; but only prepare the soul, through the Divine influence, to receive it.

God forgives the believing sinner, strictly speaking, not for the sake of his repentance, confession, forsaking, praying, or believing; but for his own name's sake. Isa. xliii. 25.

4. Forgiveness principally consists in the removal of guilt from the conscience. Heb. x. 22.

When the heart is sprinkled from an evil conscience; then all obligation to punishment is done away. John iii. 18. Rom. viii. 1.

Divine justice has now no claims upon the sinner who has believed in Christ, who bore the punishment for him. Isa. liii. 6.

II. The grand mean through which this inestimable blessing is conveyed to guilty man.

The blood of Christ.

Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sin. Heb. ix. 22.

Man, by sin, had forfeited his life, his soul, his all, to offended justice; who, ever concerned for the honour of the law, demanded his punishment.

Guilty man must die, or some one qualified for the undertaking must die for him, that the sinner might have life. Jesus died for this purpose; his blood was shed for the guilty. Matt. xxvi. 28.

His blood was necessary, as being pure and untainted. 1 Pet i. 19.

This was prefigured under the law. Num. xix. 2. Ex. xii. 5.

His blood was necessary, as being of infinite value, it being the blood of the God-man; hence called the blood of God. Acts xx. 28.

And, as such, has an infinity of merit connected with it, sufficient to save a thousand guilty worlds, if so many existed. Heb. vii. 25.

This blood was really shed in the garden, the hall, and on the cross.

Then was the fountain opened, spoken of by Zechariah, xliii. 1.

This blood sprinkles the mercy-seat.

Applied to the conscience, it saves from sin. 1 John i. 7.

The redeemed in glory have felt its efficacy. Rev. vii. 14.

And on this account celebrate the Redeemer's praise. Rev. i. 5, 6.

III. In the whole of this transaction, the riches of his grace are gloriously displayed.

1. How great is the blessing of forgiveness in itself! How welcome to a conscious, guilty soul! more welcome than a rope or plank to a drowning man; or a pardon to a criminal, with a rope about his neck, going to be hanged.

2. How unworthy the persons upon whom it is bestowed! Ungrateful, wicked, rebellious, and ungodly. Rom. v. 6.

3. How perfect is his work! He forgives all sin, takes away all guilt, nor leaves the smallest stain behind.

4. How great the punishment from which it delivers! An eternal hell; the worm that dieth not, the fire that is not quenched. Mark ix. 44.

5. How great the happiness to which it leads! an eternal heaven; fulness of joy, and rivers of pleasure for evermore. Ps. xvi. 11.

6. And how great the means employed to accomplish this end! The death of God's dear Son! For this he was dreadfully wounded, bruised and broken. Isa. liii. 5.

I shall now close the subject by some application of it: and,

1. How dreadful is the state of the impenitent, unforgiven, hardened sinner! Infinitely more dreadful than that of a man over whose head is suspended by a single hair, a naked sword; the sinner is suspended over hell by the thread of life, and is in danger of falling into it every moment. "What meanest thou, O sleeper?" &c. Jonah i. 6.

2. The most guilty may yet obtain forgiveness. Jesus shed his blood for the chief of sinners. Its efficacy is equal to the greatest guilt. Marnasseh, the thief upon the cross, Saul of Tarsus, and thousands more, have felt its saving power. Heb. xii. 1.

4. Let those who are in the possession of the blessing, gratefully bless the hand which gave it: and as the Lord has justified him freely, let them expect to be sanctified wholly. 1 Thess. v. 23. For this blood cleanses from all unrighteousness; 1 John i. 9; from all sin; verse 7; and so expect to be presented at last by Jesus, your adored Saviour, without spot, &c. Eph. v. 25—27.

THE CHARACTER AND SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

Awake, O Sword, against my shepherd, &c.—Zech. xiii. 7.

THESE words contain a plain and pointed prediction of the great Messiah, who, in the fulness of time, was to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. This opinion we deliver without the smallest hesitation.

This passage is so explained by Jesus Christ, where he evidently applies it to himself. Matt. xxvi. 31.

Consider,

1. The character of Jesus Christ, as here represented: he is called,
1. God's Shepherd. The scriptures often speak of him as such. Ps. xxiii. 1.

He is called the great Shepherd; Heb. xiii. 20; expressive of the dignity of his character, as God over all.

The chief Shepherd. 1 Pet. v. 4. In relation to his ministers, who are appointed by him, and to whom they are accountable.

The term Shepherd is relative, and refers to his followers, whom he calls his sheep. John x. 16.

It expresses his tender care over them, which is always proportioned to their peculiar trials, temptations, &c. Isa. xl. 11.

Also his love to them, infinitely surpassing the love of the sons of men: which the waters of affliction could not quench, nor the floods of temptation drown; which the terrors of a violent death could not affright,

the agonies of the cross, nor the torments of hell, destroy. He died for the sheep; John x. 15; and hence he claims the character of the good Shepherd. Ver. 11.

2. God's fellow, his equal.

They are one in essence, intimately and essentially one. John x. 30. To see the one, is to see the other. John xiv. 8, 9.

They are one in power. He made the world, John i. 3, and all things in heaven and earth. Col. i. 16, 17.

And, when on earth, he did the works his Father did. John v. 17, &c. He cured all manner of diseases. Luke vii. 21.

He forgave sins. Ver. 48.

He raised the dead. John xi. 43, 44.

They are one in honour and glory. To dishonour the Son, is to dishonour the Father; 1 John ii. 22, 23; and to honour the Son, is to honour the Father. John v. 22, 23.

His sacrifice was voluntary. As Jehovah's equal, he had an absolute right and propriety in himself, and could lay down his life, and take it up again, when he pleased. John x. 17, 18.

II. The awful mandate here given against God's Shepherd, and God's fellow: "Awake, O sword, smite the Shepherd!"

The command proceeds from the eternal Father, whose justice demanded the death of our Lord. Isa. liii. 10.

Divine justice had no demands on Christ, simply considered as the Son of God; but, when viewed as our voluntary substitute, it had the most dreadful requisitions to make upon him. Ps. xl. 7, 8.

It brought him from heaven to earth.

It pursued him through every afflicting scene of his life.

It transfixed him on the cross.

Every pain he suffered, every pang he endured, was a part of the mighty debt we owed.

1. The principal scenes of sorrow were in the garden of Gethsemane.

Here he was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. Matt. xxvi. 38.

Here, being in an agony, he prayed fervently.

And sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. Luke xxii. 44.

2. Also in the hall of judgment.

Here he was scourged. Matt. xxvii. 26.

Here he was stripped naked, arrayed in a purple robe. Ver. 28.

Crowned with a crown of thorns; put a reed into his hands, and mocked him, hailing him King of the Jews. Ver. 29.

The soldiers spit upon him, and with the reed smote him on the head. Ver. 30.

Taking off the robe, and putting on his own raiment, they led him away to death; ver. 31; bearing the cross on which he was to die. John xix. 17.

And, as if to complete the disgrace intended for him, they crucified him between two thieves. Ver. 18.

3. Calvary was the place that witnessed the dreadful deed. Luke xxiii. 33.

There he, God's Shepherd, God's fellow, was smitten both by God and man. Man nailed him to the cross, and wantonly insulted him in

his agony. The eternal Father deserted him ; Mark xv. 34 ; and smote him, by laying the sins of the whole world upon him. Isa. liii. 5, 6, 10. 1 John ii. 2.

And thus did our adored Saviour fall beneath the stroke of eternal justice, through that abundant love which he felt for our guilty, wretched souls. Eph. ii. 4.

And thus did the eternal Father smite his Son, his beloved Son, from his hatred to sin, and his boundless love to those who had committed it. John iii. 16.

III. The effect to be produced : " The sheep shall be scattered."

1. By the sheep are meant the disciples of our Lord, particularly the twelve, who were especially his pupils, his followers, his disciples. Matt. xx. 17.

2. Jesus foretold the disciples that they would forsake him, after all their professions of attachment to him. Mark xiv. 27, 29, 31.

3. It was exactly accomplished. One betrays him. Mark. xiv. 43—45. Another denies him. Verses 66—72. All forsake him. Matt. xxvi. 56.

4. And thus was an ancient prophecy fulfilled. Isa. lxiii. 3.

IV. Behold the tender compassion of a gracious God : he promises to turn his hand upon the little ones, his scattered sheep, who were running away in the hour of danger.

1. Little ones, indeed, who had at that time but little knowledge of human nature, little faith, and little courage.

2. But the Lord pitied them, and turned his hand upon them ; who protected them from the rage of the Jews, during the absence of their adored Master, and brought them together again. John xx. 19, 20.

3. And inspired them with ability to preach his truth, and make known his will to the end of the earth. Mark xvi. 15. Matt. xxviii. 20.

4. And enabled them to face the greatest dangers with the most determined courage, not counting their lives dear to them. Acts xx. 24. Who were as sheep among wolves. Matt. x. 16. And at last died gloriously in the cause of truth and holiness.

5. And were at last gathered home to God, according to the Redeemer's promise. John xiv. 2, 3. Matt. xix. 28.

6. And this he will also do for all his faithful followers at the last great day. Matt. xxiv. 31. Who will be an innumerable multitude. Rev. vii. 9. And who shall praise God and the Lamb for ever. Ver. 10.

Improvement :

1. Let us behold, in this awful transaction, the displeasure of God against sin : and if he punished it so dreadfully in the person of his own Son, what have sinners to expect who neglect this great salvation ? Heb. ii. 3.

2. As divine justice is fully satisfied by the tremendous sufferings of Jesus Christ, here we behold sufficient ground for a sinner's hope of pardon. Jesus hath died ; the sinner may be forgiven. Rom. iii. 25.

This is the ground of the prophet's declaration. Isa. lv. 7.

Of our adored Saviour's invitation. Matt. xi. 28.

Of St. Paul's and the Ephesians' experience. Eph. i. 7.

And through which alone we can attain to God. Rev. vii. 14.

To whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. Rev. i. 6.

CHRIST'S SECOND APPEARING

TO CHANGE THE BODIES OF HIS SAINTS.

For our conversation is in heaven, &c.—Phil. iii. 20, 21.

AT a very early period of the church, a number of false teachers arose, who did what they could to corrupt Christianity, and seduce believers from the simplicity that is in Christ. 2 Cor. xi. 3.

Their attempts were awfully successful in the province of Galatia. Gal. iii. 1. On this subject St. Paul expresses his astonishment, chap. i. 6, and his fear, chap. iv. 11, and pronounces a dreadful anathema against them, chap. i. 8, 9.

In the verses just before the text, he warns his beloved Philippians against those dangerous invaders; and gives a very affecting description of their character, their views, and their end. Ver. 18, 19.

In the text he recommends his own example to their imitation, together with that of his fellow-apostles: "For our conversation," says he "is in heaven," &c. by which expressions Christians are described,

I. By the nature of their conversation; it is in heaven.

The term conversation is complex, and is applied to various objects. It is applied,

1. To our speech and language in general. 2 Pet. iii. 11. And is expressive of that variety of religious subjects which usually engage the conversation of good men; such as,

The eternal God, his nature, perfections, and works of nature, providence, and grace.

Jesus Christ, his eternal power and Godhead, and his boundless love to sinners.

The eternal Spirit, in his rich variety of operations upon the mind.

The Christian's experience in all his pleasant and painful exercises.

The work of grace in the human heart, in its commencement, progress, and perfection.

The glory that is to follow, as revealed in the sacred scriptures.

These, and a variety of other subjects of a similar nature, engaging the attention and conversation of good men; with propriety they may say, "our conversation is in heaven," as it is thus engaged about things which relate to that better country.

2. To our conduct and deportment in life. Ps. xxxvii. 14; 1. 23.

The real Christian walks by a heavenly rule, God's testimonies. Ps. cxix. 59.

He is influenced by a heavenly principle, the Spirit and grace of God. Rom. viii. 14.

His actions are directed to a heavenly end, to Christ. Phil. i. 21. To God's glory. 1 Cor. x. 31. To his eternal salvation in heaven. Rom. ii. 7.

But we may remark, that the term here rendered conversation, also signifies citizenship; and hence it is,

1. That heaven is sometimes spoken of in the scriptures under the idea of a city; and in this way Abraham considered it. Heb. xi. 10, 16.

2. That real Christians are free denizens of that city of God. The church of God upon earth, and the church of God in heaven, are one, divided only by the narrow stream of death. Heb. xii. 18—24. Where the saints here are represented as already come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, &c.

They constitute but one church, having all one Father, one elder Brother, one Comforter, one happiness, only differing in degree. Theirs is glory, ours grace; grace is glory in the bud, glory is grace perfected.

They are one in affection; departed friends love us still. Our experience tells us we still love them; and, probably, they will be among the foremost to welcome us upon our arrival at the paradise of God.

II. The Christian is described by his expectation. He expects the Saviour from heaven, whence also we look for the Saviour, &c. and this expectation is founded,

1. Upon the express promise of Christ himself. Matt. xxiv. 44; xxv. 31. John xiv. 1—3. Rev. xxii. 12.

2. The declaration of the holy angels who attended his ascension into heaven. Acts. i. 10, 11.

3. Also the united testimony of the apostles of our Lord. 2 Pet. iii. 10. 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

But what, we may inquire, does the Christian expect Christ to do for him when he comes from heaven? He expects him to change his vile body, &c. And here we may observe,

1. The quality of our present habitation, a vile body, vile as it respects its original, as being the seat of numerous diseases, as being the instrument by which the soul commits sin, and as to its end; Gen. iii. 19; a newly-opened grave is an awful confirmation of that text.

2. But this vile body is to be changed, and the pattern after which it is to be fashioned is the glorious body of Christ. What his body is, that will ours be. It will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual. 1 Cor. xv. 42—44.

This work, it must be acknowledged, is a great work. When we behold a newly-opened grave, and see the scattered atoms of our departed friends; and when we connect with what we see the idea of a glorious resurrection, a glorious body, like unto Christ's glorious body, our faith is ready to stagger, and we are almost ready to exclaim, how can these things be? The answer is in the text.

3. It will be accomplished by the mighty power of Christ, by which he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

It was Jesus Christ who formed the universe, with all its rich variety. John i. 3. Col. i. 16, 17.

He formed the body of man of the dust of the earth. Gen. ii. 7. And surely the same power which originally formed man's body, can raise it again. Acts xxvi. 8.

He has already conquered the world. John xvi. 33.

And has triumphed over Satan. Col. ii. 14, 15.

And also over death and the grave in our resurrection. Rom. i. 4.

And he shall finally complete the destruction of both. Hos. xiii. 14. 1 Cor. xv. 52—54. His power, therefore, is equal to this grand design, and we are assured that he will do it; for,

4. He hath positively declared it. John v. 28, 29. And the truth and faithfulness of his character secure its accomplishment. Rev. i. 5.

Improvement:

1. How glorious are the views and expectations of the Christian!

He shall be raised to eternal life. John v. 24.

He shall be raised before the wicked. 1 Thess. iv. 16.

He shall be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.

Verse 17.

And shall be for ever with the Lord. Verse 17.

2. How awful, tremendously awful, the state of the wicked, and their future prospects!

They also shall be raised, all in their graves shall come forth. John v. 28, 29.

They shall be raised to damnation. Verse 29.

Their terror will be great. Rev. vi. 15—17.

Their end dreadful. Matt. xxv. 41.

3. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men,

To renounce their evil ways. Isa. lv. 7.

To repent of their sins. Acts iii. 19.

To believe on Jesus Christ. Acts xvi. 31.

To live to Christ. Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

And the end will be glorious. Rom. ii. 7. Rev. xiv. 13.

THE BALM OF GILEAD, A CURE FOR DISEASED SOULS.

Is there no balm in Gilead? &c.—Jer. viii. 22.

THESE words were originally spoken of God's ancient people the Jews, who, at this time, it appears, were in a dreadfully declining state. They had provoked the Lord to anger with their graven images and strange vanities. Verse 19. The prophet Jeremiah was exceedingly affected on their account, verse 21; and exclaims in the language of the text, "Is there no balm," &c.

I shall take occasion, from these words, to consider,

I. That mankind universally are in a diseased state. The soul of man is here meant, and hence the diseases alluded to are diseases of the soul. That the distempers of the mind are compared to wounds, disease, and sickness, will appear from Ps. xxxviii. 5; ciii. 3; cxlvii. 3. Ezek. xxxiv. 4. Matt. ix. 12.

We may here point out some of those diseases.

1. Atheism, infidelity, or unbelief of divine truths. This is a deadly disease, as it hinders the success of the gospel, and the saving of souls. Bad as this disease is, it is not to be found in hell. James ii. 19.

2. Ignorance of God, and of gospel truths, even among those who profess to know him. Hos. iv. 6. There are multitudes living in the midst of gospel light, who are yet in gross darkness. They may be cured. Rev. iii. 17, 18. Jer. xxiv. 7.

3. Hardness of heart : hence they sit under the word, and hear the most terrible threatenings and curses denounced against their sins, and are as much unmoved as the seats they sit on. This may be cured. Ezek. xxxvi. 26. Phil. i. 6.

4. Earthly-mindedness. This clogs the soul, and unfits it for spiritual exercises. The thoughts of God and eternity are thereby shut out.

Other plagues kill their thousands, this kills its tens of thousands. Pharaoh's words are true of them. Ex. xiv. 3. There is help for this also. Col. iii. 1, 2.

5. Aversion to spiritual duties. There are thousands who would rather toil their bodies a whole day, than spend a quarter of an hour upon their knees with God in secret. Of sabbaths and sermons they say, "What a weariness is it! when will the sabbath be gone?" Mal. i. 13. For this we obtain relief. Ps. cx. 3. Isa. xl. 31. Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

6. Hypocrisy and formality in God's service : drawing near to God with our lips only. How unpleasant to God is a voice without the heart and affections! He heavily complains of it. Isa. xxix. 13. This also may be healed. Jer. xxxi. 33. Prov. iv. 18. 2 Cor. iv. 16.

7. Trusting to our own righteousness : depending upon our duties and performances for salvation, instead of believing on Christ, with the heart unto righteousness. Rom. x. 10.

8. Indwelling corruption. Sometimes it rises like a flood, swells high, and carries all before it. Ps. lxx. 3. Isa. lxiv. 6. There is help for this also. Mic. vii. 19. Rom. vii. 24, 25.

9. Backsliding from the Lord : losing our spirituality and liveliness in God's service ; then every grace decays in the soul, and the service of God becomes a weariness to us. This is a spiritual consumption ; but it may be cured. Deut. xxx. 6. Hos. xiv. 4—6.

There are several symptoms which seem to render our diseases almost desperate and incurable.

1. When the body is *universally* affected, and with a complication of diseases, the case is truly alarming ; and this is the state of the soul. Isa. i. 5, 6. Still we may be recovered ; David was. Ps. ciii. 2, 3.

2. When diseases are of long continuance, and rooted in the habit. This is the case of the soul. Ps. li. 5. Deut. xxviii. 59. Yet the Lord can make their dry bones live. Ezek. xxxvii.

3. When all around consider their case as desperate. This is often the case with sinners. Ezek. xxxvii. 3. And they often say with Israel, "Behold, our bones are dried." Ezek. xxxvii. 11. But see the promise in this case. Jer. xxx. 17.

4. When its threatening symptoms are not observed, so as to provide timely remedies : "although the fire be kindled round about us, we lay it not to heart." Our case is not unlike that of Israel. Isa. lvii. 17. But desperate as this case may be, there is hope of deliverance. Ver. 18.

5. When the patient loses his senses, and becomes lethargic, that he cannot be awakened. And this is often the case with sinners. Isa. xxvi. 11 ; xxix. 10. Yet still there is hope. Jer. xxxiii. 6.

II. That there is a physician who can cure all our diseases.

God himself is our physician. Ex. xv. 26. Our cure is the work of the whole Trinity ; but especially of Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who

came into this world with the commission to heal souls. He opened this commission at the commencement of his ministry. Luke iv. 18. And afterwards, Matt. ix. 12, 13.

In this office of healer, he was typified by the brazen serpent. John iii. 14. By the Sun of Righteousness. Mal. iv. 2. By the tree of life. Rev. xxii. 2.

The Lord Jesus Christ, being God-man, is nobly qualified to be our soul's physician. For,

1. He is infinite in knowledge, and understands all diseases, with the proper remedies, so that he can never mistake in any case, nor make wrong applications for the cure. John xxi. 17.

2. He has sovereign authority and almighty power, whereby he can command diseases to come and go at his pleasure. Matt. ix. 2.

3. He hath infinite pity, and readiness to help the distressed; as he hath in him the compassion of a God, so he hath also the bowels of a man; hence he is inclined frequently to go to the sick without being sent for, and to the poor who have nothing to give. On this account he is represented by the good Samaritan. Luke x. 33.

4. He hath wonderful patience towards the distressed; he bears with their ingratitude, and goes on with his work, till he has accomplished a perfect cure.

III. The remedy which he applies to effect the cure, which is his *own blood*. This is the true balm of Gilead which cures the sick soul. Isa. liii. 5. And although the scriptures speak of other means of healing, all these are used in subserviency to Christ's blood, the blessed meritorious means of our cure, the only balm that procures all other means of healing us. These are,

1. The Spirit of God, with his gracious operations upon the soul. Gal. iii. 13, 14.

2. The word and ordinances of Christ. These are the leaves of the tree of life, which are for the healing of the nations. Ps. cvii. 20.

3. Afflictions. He sends those to make us feel how bitter sin is, to cause us to search our wounds, to mourn over them, and apply for the remedy. Isa. xxvii. 9.

4. Faithful ministers. The great Physician sends them to dispense sound and wholesome doctrines for that end. 1 Tim. vi. 3. Tit. ii. 1.

5. Pious Christians, even the poorest of them, help in this blessed work by their prayers. James v. 15. May such praying souls abound in all our congregations!

As to the Physician's method of applying the remedy. He

1. Makes sinners sensible that they are sick, before he makes them whole; by convincing them of sin and misery, that they may prize Christ and his healing balm; such are said to be sick. Matt. ix. 12. Now this preparatory sickness implies a discovery of the dangerous nature of the disease, sin; and anxious care to be delivered from it; a dissatisfaction with all earthly comforts; grief and sorrow of heart; Ps. xxxviii. 6, 18; despair of healing ourselves. Hos. xiv. 3. The absolute need of an infinitely wise and powerful Physician: a willingness to submit to his prescriptions, saying with Paul, Acts ix. 6.

2. Works faith in the soul by his Holy Spirit; that is to say, he

powerfully persuades and enables him to embrace Christ as his Saviour, and apply the balm of his blood and merits to his wounded soul, to remove guilt, to obtain pardon, and reconcile him to God. When this is done, the danger is over. John v. 24. To several diseased souls Jesus said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole."

3. Accomplishes and perfects the cure, by the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, rooting out the very seeds of the disease, and makes the soul perfect in holiness, and meet for entering into heaven, where constant and uninterrupted health shall be enjoyed to all eternity. Matt. v. 8.

IV. The reasons why so few are healed, notwithstanding there is a balm in Gilead, and a Physician to apply it. The cause is surely in us; for,

1. Many are ignorant of their disease, and wilfully so: they have no feeling, no care, no fear; they boast the goodness of their hearts, and thank God for it.

2. Many are in love with their disease more than with their Physician. God may say to them, as in Ps. lii. 3.

3. Many neglect the season of healing: they slight Christ and his offers in the gospel in the days of youth and health, and never inquire after him till it is too late. Jer. viii. 20.

4. Many will not trust wholly to Christ for healing; but Christ must have the sole honour of the cure, or he will not be their Physician.

5. Many will not submit to the prescriptions of Christ for healing; they will not submit to self-examination, repentance, contrition, godly sorrow, mortification, or self-denial, and therefore they are unhealed.

To conclude:

1. Let those who are in a diseased state see their danger, for it is great; and if they do not apply to this Physician they cannot be healed. Awake, therefore, O secure soul! consider thy case, and flee to the great Physician for help.

2. The balm of Gilead is freely offered to you in the gospel. Isa. xlv. 22. Ezek. xviii. 32.

3. Consider how long you have slighted this balm already. Now improve your day, like the people of Capernaum. Luke iv. 40. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

4. And those whom he has healed manifest their gratitude by living to his glory.

CHRIST'S TRANSFIGURATION.

And after six days, &c.—Matt. xvii. 1, 2.

JESUS CHRIST appeared in this world in the form of a servant; yet sometimes the rays of his divine glory shone forth with peculiar splendour, and declared him to be the Prince of Life and the Lord of Glory. This was the case at his transfiguration on the mount, in the presence of Peter, James, and John. "His face shone as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light."

Let us consider,

1. Some important facts which are established by the transfiguration of Christ.

1. That he is the Son of God, and a Mediator between God and sinners.

A voice was heard out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son," &c. Verse 5; a plain intimation that Christ is a Divine person, and the Saviour of sinners.

There are three persons that have communion in the same Divine nature, and are one God; and the distinction between the first and second persons of the Trinity is set forth in scripture by the relation of Father and Son. The Son is of the same substance with the Father, and has communion with him in all his infinite perfections: he is his only begotten Son; John i. 14; and the Jews attempted to kill him, because he called God his Father, &c. John v. 18.

God here calls him "his beloved Son," and he takes the highest complacency and pleasure in him: he was with him from eternity, and daily his delight. Prov. viii. 23, 30, 31. He loveth him, &c. John iii. 35.

He is well pleased with him in the accomplishment of our salvation: it is in Christ that God reveals his justice, wisdom, and love, in the highest perfection: he has obeyed the law in precepts and penalties, and made full satisfaction to God for the sins of mankind. "It pleased the Lord to bruise him," &c. Isa. liii. 10. How divine and able a Saviour is Christ! He is Immanuel, &c. Heb. i. 3.

He is the messenger of his Father's love; we are "to hear him." He has revealed to us the Father's intentions to save mankind by the merits of the cross. John iii. 16. He has declared that the greatest sinners may be pardoned and saved. He has promised the Holy Ghost to assist us in the work of salvation. John xvi. 7, 8. He has told his followers that they shall have his presence with them upon earth: that after death they shall be advanced to the kingdom of heaven: that their bodies shall be raised from the grave, and clothed with the robes of immortality and glory; and that they shall be for ever with the Lord. John xiv. 3.

The great God is well pleased with all those who fly to Christ for salvation. John vi. 40.

2. His transfiguration is an evidence that he will come from heaven at the last day, with great power and majesty. 2 Pet. i. 16—18. Though Christ is man, yet the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwells in him; and if the Godhead diffused such a lustre over his body at his transfiguration, what superior brightness will it spread over his humanity when he comes to judge the world!

When Christ was transfigured, Moses, the giver of the Jewish law, and Elias, the restorer of it from many gross corruptions, appeared with him in glory, to teach us that the gospel is a more excellent institution than the law; and that Christ will be attended with millions of angels and saints when he comes to judge the world. Luke ix. 30, 31.

Though Christ lived in low circumstances while he was upon earth, accompanied by poor fishermen, yet the glorified saints and angels will attend him at the last great day. Matt. xxv. 31. Jude, verse 14. Then he will raise the bodies of the saints, publicly own them for his people, and put them in possession of eternal life. Matt. xxv. 34.

He will judge the wicked, and condemn them to eternal torments. Matt. xxv. 41.

O what a joyful and terrible day will this be! How will the awful solemnities of it turn to the honour of Christ our Redeemer! 2 Thess. i. 10.

3. His transfiguration is a pledge and emblem of the future glorification of the saints; he is their pattern and example, both in their sanctification and glorification.

Though their bodies turn to dust, they shall be raised, and richly endowed with divine and heavenly qualities: he himself is the first fruits from the dead. 1 Cor. xv. 20.

What divine beauty and lustre shall the bodies of the saints be clothed with, when they shall resemble the body of Christ, the Lord of glory! Phil. iii. 21. They shall be so refined from all gross qualities, as to resemble a spirit in their nature: they shall be strong, lively, and active, and no hinderance to the soul in its holy desires and operations.

They shall see Christ in his glory. Col. iii. 4. They now see him by faith, and in the ordinances of the gospel; but then, face to face. 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

II. Make some observations upon the event, and the circumstances attending it.

1. God is sometimes pleased to grant unto his children very blessed manifestations of his presence and love, before he brings them into a state of peculiar suffering. God here owns Christ for his Son, before he suffers and dies.

2. The sight of Christ's glory is delightful to the saints. All the perfections of God shine with the brightest lustre in the person of Christ. Col. i. 15. The disciples were delighted with the views of his glory, and said, "It is good for us to be here;" and wished to make three tabernacles, and there to abide. Verse 4.

3. When the Lord reveals the divine glory to his saints, their minds are impressed with an holy awe of his greatness and majesty.

When God revealed himself in a vision to Jacob, "he was afraid," &c. Gen. xxviii. 17.

At such seasons the saints behold his all-sufficiency, and sink into their own nothingness; his majesty and greatness, which fill them with humility and self-abasement; his perfect purity filling them with a sense of their own vileness.

When the disciples saw the cloud which overshadowed them, and heard God's voice, they fell on their faces, and were sore afraid. Verses 5, 6.

4. The Saviour delights in comforting his people upon earth, as well as to save and bring them to heaven.

When the disciples were terrified at the displays of divine majesty upon the mount, Jesus came to them, and said unto them, "Arise, be not afraid." Verses 6, 7.

The heart of Christ is full of tenderness towards his children, and he delights in speaking peace to them. "Be of good cheer," said he, Matt. xiv. 27. "Fear not, little flock." Luke xii. 32. "Let not your heart be troubled." John xiv. 1. And, "Peace I leave with you," &c. John xiv. 27.

Though Christ is now absent from his saints, as to his bodily presence, yet he often comforts them in the ordinances of the gospel, and revives

them with the sweet promises of his grace: he speaks to them by his Spirit, and conveys peace and comfort to their hearts.

After these things, Jesus and his disciples came down from the mountain: the vision was at an end, and the glorious scene was finished. Matt. xvii. 9.

5. The presence of Christ with his saints here is but of short duration, and subject to many interruptions.

Having enjoyed the presence of Christ for a season in his ordinances, they come down from the mount of vision, into the valley of the world, and are employed about the concerns of life.

This glimpse of the Redeemer's glory, is an emblem of that immediate, full, and everlasting vision of his glory, with which the saints shall be blessed in the kingdom of God. For,

6. Their enjoyment of his presence there will be everlasting: it will never be interrupted by sin. They shall be so filled with a sense of his love to them, that they will always love and serve him with the greatest vigour; and their hearts will never wander from him. They shall be for ever with him. 1 Thess. iv. 17.

III. Apply what has been delivered.

1. If Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of sinners, we may infer the happiness of those who trust in him by faith. As God and man, in one person, he is a glorious Saviour, suited to the wants and necessities of guilty sinners.

As their Priest, he has satisfied divine justice for their sins: they are united to Christ, and their sins are pardoned. As their Prophet, he teaches them divine things; yea, the whole will of God. And,

As their King, he guards them in all dangers, and enables them to overcome sin, Satan, and the world.

They have peace with God, through the atonement of Christ.

They are the sons of God, through faith in his blood.

And in virtue of that blood, they shall have admission into the beatific presence of God in heaven, where there are fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

2. If the transfiguration of Christ is a pledge of the saints' future glory, the consideration of it should raise them superior to the sorrows of the present state.

How happy are they who are one with Christ, and are the heirs of salvation! They shall be enriched with the same glory which Christ now possesses in heaven.

Their number upon earth appears to be but few; but in heaven there will not only be Moses and Elias, a few humble worshippers, but the "general assembly" and whole "church of the first born," even an "innumerable company," saying, "Salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever." Rev. vii. 9, 10.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

But those things which God before had showed, &c.—Acts iii. 18.

THESE are the words of St. Peter, one of our Lord's disciples: they were addressed to a large assembly of his own countrymen, the Jews,

upon the occasion of a stupendous miracle wrought by him upon the lame man, who usually sat at the beautiful gate of the temple.

He here prefers a dreadful charge against them, "in killing the Prince of life;" but palliates their guilt, in some measure, by observing that through ignorance they did it, as also their rulers. Verse 17. Then adds the text, "But those things," &c. Let us consider,

I. The character and dignity of Jesus Christ, who in our text is said to suffer.

1. He is God and man united in one person: the second person in the adorable Trinity, frequently called in scripture the "Son of God." John i. 34. He is of the same essence and nature with his Father. John x. 30. He is eternal. Rev. i. 5. He existed from eternity with the Father, and is the Creator of all things. John i. 3. He is the mighty God, &c. Isa. ix. 6. King of kings, &c. Rev. xix. 16. God blessed for ever. Rom. ix. 5. He is infinitely exalted above all the holy angels, and is the object of their worship and adoration. Rev. v. 13.

2. This glorious person, "the Son of God," became man; John i. 14; and was God manifest in the flesh. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

3. How admirable is the constitution of our Redeemer's person! In his human nature he suffers exquisite pains and sorrows; and from his Divine nature is derived infinite merit and efficacy upon his sufferings and death.

4. He is called the Holy One, and the Just; 1 Pet. iii. 18; knew no sin; 1 Pet. ii. 22; was holy, harmless, &c. Heb. vii. 26.

5. The Prince of Life; verse 15; having life essential in himself; John xi. 25; and the Author and Giver of Life. Heb. v. 9. John x. 28. Rev. ii. 10.

II. What it was that he did suffer.

His sufferings were many and various. Oh! what tongue can express them? what heart can conceive of them aright? But, though they cannot be enumerated particularly, they may be reduced to the following heads:

1. He suffered in his reputation, having crimes of the blackest nature laid to his charge.

His enemies called him a glutton, &c. Luke vii. 34; contrary to his professed design in coming to the world, which was to destroy the works of the devil. 1 John iii. 8.

They represented him as casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. Matt. xii. 24.

They accused him of sedition and rebellion against the Roman emperor, though he wrought a miracle to pay him tribute. Luke xxiii. 2.

Also of blasphemy against God, Matt. xxvi. 65, although he always did the things which pleased his Father.

With what scorn and contempt was he treated when he was upon earth! Herod and his men of war mocked him. Luke xxiii. 11. A murderer was preferred to him. Luke xxiii. 18. They who passed by while he was upon the cross reviled him. Matt. xxvii. 39. Also the rulers and chief priests. Verse 41.

2. He suffered great agonies and distresses in his soul, which God inflicted upon him for the sins of mankind. See his agony in the garden,

where he began to be sore amazed and heavy. Matt. xxvi. 37, 38. Mark xiv. 33, 34, and sweat as it were great drops of blood. Luke xxii. 44.

At this time none of his enemies were near him ; no hand of man upon him ; but the sword of justice was now drawn against him. Zech. xiii. 7.

God the Father impressed his mind with the painful sense of his infinite displeasure against the sins of mankind, whose cause he had espoused.

It was now that he felt what the curses of God's broken law were : here he felt that exquisite tribulation and anguish which we must have suffered for ever, if he had not suffered in our stead. 1 Pet. ii. 24.

Oh ! how great was the burden and weight of sin ! How much did Christ suffer to redeem and save lost souls !

The Father did not spare him : it was the heat of God's indignation against sin that melted the heart of Christ. Ps. xxii. 14. When he bruised him, and made his soul an offering for sin. Isa. liii. 10.

Though God was always well pleased with his Son, and with all he did for poor sinners, yet he thought proper to withdraw from him, for a season, the comfortable sense of his love ; hence his loud cry upon the cross, " My God, my God !" &c. Matt. xxvii. 46. It was then that he bore the full punishment of our sins. 1 Pet. ii. 24.

3. He suffered many bodily pains, and death itself upon the cross.

When the Jews apprehended him, they bound him in a barbarous manner, John xviii. 12, that we might not be bound with the chains of divine wrath, but be delivered from the bondage of sin.

They blindfolded him, buffeted, and smote him. Matt. xxvi. 67. Luke xxii. 64.

They scourged him with cords, John xix. 1, and ploughed upon his back, and made long furrows there, Ps. cxxix. 3, that by his dreadful stripes we might be healed. Isa. liii. 5.

They put a crown of thorns upon his head, to expose him to contempt and pain, and hailed him King of the Jews. John xix. 2, 3.

They crucified him, nailed him to the cross, on which he expired in great torture. This was an ignominious death, which the Romans inflicted on their slaves ; yet he despised the " shame " of it. Heb. xii. 2. It was a cursed death. Gal. iii. 13. It was a painful death : his body was extended at full length, and no member of it was free from pain. He was immoveably fixed to the cross ; his pains were not at any time intermitted, nor in any degree abated. His death was tedious and lingering ; he was nailed to the cross about nine o'clock in the morning, and expired upon it about three o'clock in the afternoon. Mark xv. 25, 34, 37.

While he hung upon the cross, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and there came out blood and water. John xix. 34. The heart is the fountain of blood, and is enclosed in a membrane called the pericardium, which is full of water. Both were pierced, and poured out blood and water. Then was opened the " fountain for sin," &c. Zech. xiii. 1. The piercing of his heart is an undeniable evidence of his death ; and he died that we might live.

III. The reasons why he should suffer.

1. That God might be glorified.

The wisdom of God is displayed in finding out a way, whereby the authority of the law is maintained, by the execution of its curses, and the transgressors of it pardoned.

The truth of God is glorified by the death of Christ, for he declared that the sin of man should be punished with death.

The justice of God is magnified, by demanding from Christ, our surety, complete satisfaction for those dishonours which we had cast upon him.

The holiness of God shines forth with an awful lustre, by his delivering Christ up to a painful death for our sakes, though he is his own dear Son, infinitely beloved by him; and the mercy of God is exalted in pardoning rebels, and making them his sons, and receiving them into his kingdom of glory.

2. That sinners might be saved.

Christ was wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities; Isa. liii. 5; and in him they have redemption, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. Eph. i. 7.

He died to destroy the devil, and deliver mankind from the evils and miseries which Satan introduced into the world. Heb. ii. 14.

He died to make way for the effusion of the Spirit, to cleanse and sanctify sinners, and prepare them for glory. Eph. v. 26, 27.

He died to take the sting out of death, and make death a blessing to the saints. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.

He died to bring us to God, into a state of conformity to God, and communion with him in this world, and the everlasting enjoyment of him in the world to come. 1 Pet. iii. 18. Heb. ii. 10.

The application :

1. The greatest sinners, who trust in the death of Christ by faith, shall be pardoned for the sake of it. O ye desponding souls! behold your Saviour by faith; remember he is God, as well as man, and his death is infinitely meritorious. Have you been great sinners? Remember, there is no ground for despair: you have a great High Priest in the court of heaven, who made atonement for all your sins; look, then, to the suffering, dying, and redeeming Jesus, and be saved. Isa. xlv. 22.

2. From the sufferings and death of Christ, we learn the great evil and malignity of sin. The dearer Christ was to God, the more clearly does his hatred to sin appear, in punishing his Son for our crimes, which were imputed to him.

3. While we view our suffering and dying Saviour, let us repent of our sins, which were the meritorious cause of his sufferings and death. We should look on him we have pierced, and mourn. Zech. xii. 10. How should our souls be filled with holy grief and sorrow, when we consider what our sins have done! It was sin that made his soul sorrowful even to death; that betrayed, accused, and condemned the Son of God: it tore the flesh from his body, his temples; that pierced his side, and crucified the Lord of glory.

4. In his death we see the love of the Father, in giving his Son to die for sinners. 1 John iv. 9. What cause is here to admire the condescension and mercy of God towards us.

And, also, the love of the Son of God : he lay in his Father's bosom from eternity ; but his love to us brought him from heaven to earth, to die for our sins.

And the more painful and various his sufferings were, the greater should be our love to him.

ANGELS, STUDENTS IN THE MYSTERIES OF REDEMPTION.

Which things the angels, &c.—1 Pet. i. 12.

THE things revealed to us in the gospel are the most admirable and excellent. In these things the divine perfections are displayed, especially the depths of wisdom and the heights of love. But here is an additional recommendation to them in the text ; the angels contemplate them with pleasure and delight.

This was shadowed forth to us by the two cherubs that looked towards the mercy-seat, and the figures of angels that were round about the veil, and to which the apostle seems to allude in the text.

In speaking from this passage, I shall,

I. Consider what those things are which the angels look into.

They must of necessity be the things which the apostle had been speaking of, especially in the three preceding verses : the things of Christ. But I shall here *particularly* show the things which the angels desire to look into.

1. The incarnation of Christ, or his coming into this world. God manifest in the flesh, and dwelling among us, are condescensions which no doubt engage their thoughts and attention. He is said to be seen of angels with admiration and astonishment. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

2. The life of Christ. That perfect pattern of all that was excellent is often before their eyes, and entertains and delights them ; for if holy men read it with pleasure, angels must view it with the same feeling. They rejoice when a holy Christ is formed in us ; and why not more so in viewing his life who is the fountain of holiness ?

3. The death of Christ. The miracles that attended it ; the patience and submission of it ; the end and design of it ; the fruits and effects of it ; all form to them the most delightful meditation. But the love of it, in his dying for sinful man, must be to them subject of perpetual wonder and praise. His sufferings are mentioned in the preceding verse.

4. The doctrines of Christ. His admirable lessons of piety and virtue ; his wise precepts and instructions ; his wonderful revelations of the divine will ; his methods and prescriptions in order to train us up for glory, must be highly entertaining to them. Although many of us may disregard the gospel, the angel is represented as having it in his hand. Rev. xiv. 6.

5. The promises of Christ. Although not made to them, yet they view them with pleasure, as being made to the heirs of salvation, to whom they are elder brethren : the promises of grace, of consolation,

and of glory. They were the messengers by which God conveyed some of them to his people. Luke ii. 10. Matt. i. 21.

II. The manner in which the angels look into these things.

1. With wonder. They wonder and admire with holy amazement: they view the depths of redeeming love; his exceeding grace to miserable sinners; the methods by which he brings them to himself; his condescension in stooping so low, and man's being raised so high; fallen angels passed by; men restored and taken into favour. They cannot fathom it, nor account for it, only it so pleased God; hence the object of their everlasting wonder.

2. With the closest attention. If we neglect the gospel, they *pry* into it, as some render the text; as John and Mary looked carefully into the sepulchre. John xx. 5, 11. And as we are to do to the word. James i. 25. They are said to *hearken* to the voice of God's word. Ps. ciii. 20.

3. With reverence. However lightly we may think and speak of these things, they regard them in a manner becoming the depth, wisdom, and excellency of them. The angel that communed with John said, "These words are true and faithful." And when John would have fallen at his feet, he forbade it, saying, "I am," &c. Rev. xxii. 9.

4. With delight. These things becoming their great and noble minds. They were delighted at the creation of the world; Job xxxviii. 7; how much more so at the redemption of the world! They rejoiced at the birth of our Saviour. Luke ii. 13, 14. Perhaps all the angels joined together upon that occasion; Heb. i. 6; and they rejoice in the prospect of the universal empire of Christ. Rev. xi. 15.

5. With praise. They adore and praise God in the contemplation of them, and draw matter of praise and thanksgiving from them. "Glory to God" was a part of their song, as before mentioned. It was an angel that said, "Let us," &c. Rev. xix. 7. And it was the voice of many angels that said, "Worthy," &c. Rev. v. 12.

III. The proof or reason of their doing so.

The text evidently declares it; but there are other evidences of it.

1. The angels being employed so much about these things, seems to show that they desire to look into them. By them Christ's coming was foretold. Dan. ix. 24. An angel brought the news of an approaching Saviour. Luke i. 26, 27, &c. An angel revealed Christ's approach to Joseph, to the shepherds; directed Joseph to fly with him into Egypt, and admonished him to return; comforted him after his fasting and temptation; Matt. iv. 11; strengthened him in his agony; attended his resurrection, his ascension, and shall come with him to judgment. Matt. xxv. 31. 1 Thess. i. 7.

They are employed about his people. They have a charge for it. Ps. xci. 11. They minister to them. Heb. i. 14. They are our guardians. They went before Abraham's servant; they comforted Hagar. Gen. xxi. 17, &c. They are present in our assemblies. 1 Cor. xi. 10. They conduct us to heaven: See Lazarus. They shall take us out of our graves. Matt. xxiv. 31.

2. These things concern angels as well as men. God is their Father, as well as ours, and the portion of both. Christ is our head, as to

redemption ; theirs as to confirmation. Col. i. 20. Eph. i. 10. By Christ their knowledge is improved. Eph. iii. 10.

3. God is glorified in and by these things. Their work is to glorify him. Rev. vii. 11. Ps. cxlviii. 2. The seraphims cry, "Holy." Isa. vi. 3. In the gospel his wisdom and power shine forth. 1 Cor. i. 24. His grace and goodness, Eph. ii. 7 ; his truth, Eph. i. 13, &c. and hence they desire to look into them.

4. They are for the highest good of man, and therefore the angels desire to look into them. They have a great love to us, and a generous concern for our welfare. They love us because God hath loved us ; they rejoice at our conversion. Luke xv. 10. Hence they look into these things, because they are of so much interest to us.

5. The subject matter of these things is such, as that the angels must needs desire to look into them. Never were greater things than those which Christ has revealed to us : they are of the greatest worth and excellency ; deep, mysterious, and uncommon. What scenes of grace and glory are displayed in the gospel ! his incarnation ; hidden treasures of wisdom ; the mysteries of his love ; the triumphs of his death.

Application :

1. Since the angels look into these things, do you look more into them. Converse with the Bible more closely and frequently : look into it for comfort, to discover your part in the promises ; for weapons to encounter sin, Satan, death, and every other foe ; to raise your dead hearts, &c.

2. Since the angels look into these things, do you put a higher value upon them. The Psalmist prized them above thousands of gold and silver ; to him they were sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb. Paul desired to know nothing but Christ, and counted all things loss for him. Phil. iii. 8.

3. Since the angels look into these things, see that you have a saving interest in them, otherwise the angels that look into them will witness against you. Take care that this God and Christ be yours : that these promises, these privileges, this pardon, this peace, this life, and glory be yours : otherwise, the hearing of these things will turn to your everlasting condemnation.

CHRIST THE SINNER'S REFUGE.

That by two immutable things, &c.—Heb. vi. 18.

WHAT John the Divine says of his epistolary writings, may be said of evangelical doctrines in general : they were written that the Christian's joy may be full. How precious are the promises of God ! the soul that has taken hold of his covenant, and knows that it is unchangeable, may enter into rest. And so the apostle would have us to understand the matter, from these words which I have read, "That by two," &c. Whence I shall attempt to give some account,

I. Of this hope set before us.

1. By this hope we may understand Christ himself, who is the object.

foundation, and author of his children's hope. Hence it is the name by which he is called. 1 Tim. i. 1. He was the hope of the Old Testament saints. Upon his character and mediation depend all our expectations still, and on him alone.

2. Eternal life, which is the final happiness of good men, and completion of all their desires. Ver. 19. Our title to that happiness, our meetness for it, our perseverance in the way, and possession of it in the end, are derived only through Christ, and faith in him. Col. i. 27.

3. This hope is said to be set before us ; namely, by divine revelation ; not in the ancient schools of philosophy. They knew little of a future state ; and with respect to a Mediator between God and man, they were entirely in the dark. It is set before us, not for our amusement, far less to be the scorn of the thoughtless and profane ; but to view its excellency and beauty, that we may enjoy the comfort of it. Rom. iii. 25.

II. Of this figurative expression, and the character contained in it, of flying for refuge to lay hold upon this hope.

There is a manifest allusion here to the cities of refuge under the law. They are of divine appointment, and an illustrious type of Christ. They are recorded in Num. xxxv. and Josh. xx. As the manslayer was to flee to them for safety, so the awakened sinner must flee to Christ from incensed justice and the wrath to come. They must "fly for refuge," &c. which implies,

1. Not only that they are in imminent danger, but sensible of it. That he is the man with whom God is angry every day. That the arrows of the Almighty are pointed against him ; and his wonted security a refuge of lies. In consequence of this,

2. There is abundant concern after some means and method of safety. The thoughts that formerly ran after every vanity, are now called home ; and the anxious inquiry is, "What must I do to be saved?" Some almost despair. All refuge seems to fail : "Is his mercy clean gone?" Ps. lxxvii. 8, 9.

3. A persuasion, in some degree, at least, of being safe by following this course. The grounds of this persuasion are, the appointment of a Mediator, the offers of mercy in the gospel, that none such were ever rejected by him, that the most enormous offenders have been forgiven and washed in his blood, &c. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

4. The most cordial approbation of this plan of mercy. Christ is received in the whole of his character, for all the purposes of pardon, purity, and eternal life. And having happily arrived at the city of refuge, he is determined to abide there. "This is my rest," &c. Ps. cxxxii. 14.

III. Illustrate the nature and qualities of the consolation of those who have "fled," &c.

In general it is the rest and refreshing, the sabbath and satisfaction of the soul, arising from the belief of God's promises in Christ, and feeling their sacred power and energy. It is a "joy and peace in believing." The usual means are the word and dispensers of the gospel. Hence ministers are helpers of the people's joy. But to be more particular, I observe,

1. That the world cannot give this consolation, no earthly good, all

of them are broken cisterns ; but this consolation flows from the pure river of life, the streams whereof make glad the city of God. Ps. xlvii.

4. Which leads me to observe,

2. That it is from above, and spiritual : hence called, “ the consolations of God,” to express their origin and excellency. This is delicious fruit, and tastes strongly of heaven. It grows only on the tree of life ; pardon to a malefactor, ransom to a galley-slave, recovery to the sick, are highly relished by them ; but what is this to the joy of having received the atonement ? &c. &c.

3. It is called *strong consolation* in the text. When God speaks peace to the soul, when conscience approves, and the Spirit witnesses to adoption, what a spring-tide of it must flow in upon the soul ! It makes them active for God, strong to repel every assault, and to perform every duty. Neh. viii. 10.

4. It is permanent and abiding. 2 Thess. ii. 16. Other joys fall into decay and death. In sickness, pain, passion, and death, the sinner's mirth is changed into mourning ; but this consolation will stand by us in every circumstance, until we are transplanted to that better country where there is fulness of joy, &c. Ps. xvi. 11.

The grounds of this consolation are the two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie : his *promise* and his *oath*. The promise is often upon record, and the nature of the oath is in Gen. xxii. 15—17. And the promise made to Abraham extends to all his seed, so that every believing soul has the same encouragement for salvation that he had. And that,

1. From the promise of God. He cannot lie : he is able to perform. The promise gives a right to his fidelity and power. Hence his justice, as well as truth and mercy, are concerned to pardon the believing penitent. 1 John i. 9.

2. His oath. He swears by himself, and pledges, as it were, his Godhead : and is content (with reverence be it spoken) to forfeit his Deity, or be esteemed false, if he does not make his promise good, which he has sealed with his oath, that in Abraham's seed all nations of the earth should be blessed ; that, through Christ, the promised seed, all who apply to God through him, should receive pardon, peace, sanctification, and every blessing of the new covenant. I shall improve the subject, by inquiring,

1. Is this your character ? Have you fled to Christ for refuge ? If so, he is precious to you in the merit of his cross, the power of his resurrection, &c. &c. And let me counsel you to abide there. The safety of the manslayer depended upon his abiding in the city of refuge, and your safety depends upon your abiding in Christ. John xv. 4, 6.

2. Let me call upon the self-righteous and secure, the stout-hearted and profane, to follow the course exhibited in the text. You must be conscious of a thousand indignities offered to the Majesty of heaven. How then art thou prepared to meet him ? Be persuaded to fly to the rock of thy salvation. There is hope set before thee ; you may obtain pardon, the divine favour, and eternal glory.

SALVATION BY GRACE.

By grace ye are saved.—Eph. ii. 8.

THE salvation of sinners by the free grace of God, is indeed a joyful sound, and more especially to those who are convinced of their lost estate by nature and practice. It is a subject which frequently engaged the attention of the inspired writers, especially the apostles of Jesus Christ; and none more so than St. Paul. He admired that grace which had pardoned and sanctified him, when his stains were so deep, and his offences grown to such an amazing height. His design in this epistle to the Ephesians is to magnify the freedom and riches of God's grace in the salvation of sinners, both Jews and Gentiles: they had been dead in sin; ver. 1; but had been quickened by God, as the effect of his mercy, love, and grace. Verses 4, 5. "By grace," &c.

I. Inquire what is implied in this salvation mentioned in the text. It implies,

1. That mankind are naturally in a lost estate. This is the language of Scripture. Matt. xv. 24. Luke xix. 10. God is an all-sufficient good, and the only happiness of his creatures: but mankind by sin have lost this good: they have lost the comfortable sense of his love, and are by nature children of wrath. Eph. ii. 3.

They have lost his image which he put upon them, the beautiful garments of holiness, and are now covered with sin and folly.

They have lost the delightful company of God; all that holy fellowship and communion there was between God and man in a state of innocence, has been interrupted and broken off by sin; and they have lost all that sweetness and blessedness they once enjoyed in him.

2. Mankind are departed from God; not from his essential presence, "for in him they live," &c. Acts xvii. 28; but from all holy converse with him by faith and love: they are all gone out of the way of duty, peace, and happiness, into the paths of sin, shame, and misery. Rom. iii. 11, 12, 16, 17.

They have wandered to a long and wretched distance from God, and they have lost all power and inclination of themselves to return to him again.

They are not sensible of their lost estate, they feel not the misery, neither see the danger of it.

They can mourn for the loss of wealth, and of earthly friends: the loss of these comforts goes nigh their hearts; but they will not lament a lost God, nor mourn over a lost soul.

3. Mankind, in a state of nature, are sinners and rebels against the great Sovereign of heaven and earth: they have broken his law, and are under its curse. Rom. iii. 19.

They have destroyed themselves in body and soul. Hos. xiii. 9. Their bodies are subject to disease, pain, mortality, and at last shall turn to rottenness and dust. Their understanding is darkened; their hearts defiled with sin, and their conscience stained with guilt.

Having sinned against so glorious a being as God is, they deserve to

be cast into hell ; to be separated from the presence of God, the chiefest good, and to be punished with grievous torments in this prison for ever.

Such is the wretched state of man. But his case is not desperate ; he may yet be saved ; he may yet be happy : which leads me,

II. To open the nature of the gospel salvation, and show what it is for sinners to be saved.

1. This word "saved," is of various import in the scriptures.

It is sometimes put for temporal deliverances, from dangers, troubles, and distresses. Ex. xiv. 30. Ps. lix. 2.

But it is more especially made use of to express our spiritual recovery by Christ, from all the evils of our fallen state ; and the enjoyment of those inestimable blessings which God in Christ bestows upon his people, both in this world and in the kingdom of glory. This salvation is begun upon earth, and completed in heaven.

In this sense it is to be understood, in Matt. i. 21. Tit. iii. 5. Heb. v. 9 ; and also in the text. Sinners are saved by grace, that is to say, delivered from sin and hell, and brought to heaven by the undeserved mercy and favour of God.

2. Those who are saved by the grace of God, were made sensible by his Spirit that they were lost creatures : have felt the burden of sin, and have cried for salvation. Acts xvi. 30.

Without hope and help for themselves, they have been led by the Holy Spirit to receive Christ by faith, and to rest the weight of their soul's dependence upon the atonement of his death.

In him they have received the forgiveness of their sins ; they are accepted of God ; their souls are renewed ; their lives have become holy and blameless ; and God has given them his Spirit as a pledge and earnest of their heavenly inheritance.

3. This salvation is of great extent.

Its glorious scheme was contrived before the foundations of the earth were laid, with all the means necessary in order to its accomplishment. 2 Tim. i. 9.

This salvation is begun on earth, when sinners are delivered from the guilt and dominion of sin ; are made the children of God by his adopting and renewing grace.

It will be in its fullest glory after the resurrection, when body and soul shall be the joyful sharers of it. 1 John iii. 2. Col. iii. 4.

III. Explain the scripture sense of the word grace, and prove from the sacred writings that sinners are saved by grace.

The term grace, signifies the undeserved favour of one being to another.

When applied to men, it signifies their kindness, favour, and goodwill. 2 Sam. xvi. 4. Esther ii. 17.

When applied to God, it signifies his free and undeserved favour towards sinful men, without any desert of theirs ; and in this sense Paul speaks of it in 1 Cor. xv. 10. Eph. iii. 2.

It sometimes signifies those holy principles and dispositions which God forms in the souls of his people. Ps. lxxxiv. 11. 2 Cor. viii. 7. Heb. xiii. 9. From which scriptures, it appears that the term grace signifies not only God's good-will to his people, but also his good work

in them; for there is not any thing heavenly and divine in any of them, but what the grace of God has produced.

In the text, it signifies the free and undeserved favour and mercy of God towards sinful, guilty men. It is by grace they are saved; which will appear when we consider,

1. That the contrivance of our salvation by Christ, is the product of divine grace. In infinite wisdom and love he contrived the plan, and made it known by the ministry of angels. Luke ii. 14.

The first purpose in the mind of God to save sinners, proceeded from the greatness and freeness of his love. John iii. 16.

Sinners become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; Gal. iii. 26; and this faith is wrought in the heart by a divine power. John vi. 44. Eph. ii. 8.

Divine grace shines with a beautiful lustre in the constitution of the gospel, and hence called the word of God's grace. Acts xx. 32.

2. The justification of sinners is an act of God's free grace. Rom. iv. 16. Tit. iii. 7. Eph. i. 7. Rom. iii. 24. In all these places the apostle Paul magnifies the grace of God, as the original and first moving cause of our justification from sin: and in the last text he uses these words, "freely," and "by his grace."

3. The regeneration of sinners is the work of free grace and mercy. Tit. iii. 5. 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. James i. 18. God is the author of this change, and the moving cause of it is his own will.

4. The progress of the saints in faith and holiness, is the effect of divine grace. If God was to leave them to themselves, their faith and holiness would soon be lost. See Peter's prayer, 1 Pet. v. 10; and his declaration, 1 Pet. i. 5. O trembling believer! thy keeper is the everlasting God. Only take care to keep thy faith, and thy God will keep thee!

5. Heaven, with all the glory and blessedness of that happy place, is the free gift of God: it is owing to his rich and undeserved grace that the saints are made possessors of it; he gives them the kingdom. Luke xii. 32. They are looking for the mercy of Jesus unto eternal life. Jude, verse 21; and which is the gift of God. Rom. vi. 23.

Hence it appears,

1. That as our salvation, from first to last, is of grace, the praise of all is due to God.

2. What a mercy it is to possess a well-grounded hope of this salvation in all its glory; and here also we are indebted to the grace of God. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

3. The glorious work of redemption will be the subject of eternal admiration with the saints in heaven: they will always wonder and adore, when they consider that a God of grace and mercy has set so rich a crown on the heads of those, who were at once so vile and so unworthy.

SEASONS OF GRACE UNIMPROVED, &C.

The harvest is past, &c.—Jer. viii. 20.

SUMMER and harvest are proper seasons of action; opportunities for armies to take the field, to subdue enemies, and bring about deliverance

for an oppressed people. The winter that follows is not a fit season for action. It is an awful thing, when favourable seasons for saving a people from temporal enemies and calamities are lost; but it is infinitely more alarming to lose favourable seasons of saving their souls. This is ground for the deepest lamentation, when they are forced to say, "The harvest is past," &c. I shall consider,

I. Some of those favourable seasons which we should be careful to improve to the salvation of our souls.

1. The summer days of youth. This is a hopeful season. God loves the first ripe fruits: young prayers, young tears, young faith, love, &c. Eccl. xii. 1.

2. When persons enjoy lively means and ordinances: when Christ crucified is set before them with holy fervour and feeling.

3. When there is a noise and shaking among the dry bones: when the work of conviction and conversion is going forward: when the Sun of Righteousness is arising with healing under his wings.

4. When Satan's power is restrained, and the churches have rest from persecution: this is a calm summer day.

5. When God is visiting mankind with alarming dispensations of providence: this is a season for improvement, and the inhabitants of the earth should learn righteousness.

II. Who may be said to have lost their summer days and favorable seasons of grace.

Although we cannot be positive as to any while life remains, yet of some there may be sad grounds to fear that the text is too applicable to them. These are,

1. Those who have had the Spirit long striving with them, and have resisted all his operations, that he strives with them no longer: their state is very hopeless. Ezek. xxiv. 13.

2. Those who persist in sinful courses, and harden themselves against the reproofs of the Almighty: their state is truly alarming. Prov. xxix. 1.

3. Those who sin presumptuously; that is, venture upon sin against light, in hopes of repentance and pardon: their case is dismal. Num. xv. 30.

4. Those who are so determinately bent on sin, that God, their own conscience, and the ministers of God, cease to reprove them. Ezek. iii. 27. Hos. iv. 17.

5. Those who deliberately relapse into sin, after being visited with rods, with convictions; after having formed repeated resolutions and vows. Isa. i. 5.

6. Those who give themselves up to commit sin with greediness, and glory in it. Eph. iv. 19. Phil. iii. 19.

7. Those who despise the offers of the gospel, and mock the messengers who bring them. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16. Alas! all such have reason to fear that their harvest is past, their summer ended, for they are not saved. Their case is very hopeless, though not beyond the reach of sovereign grace.

III. The causes why men lose their hopeful seasons. And these are,

1. Unbelief: for did men believe the truth of God's word, his terrible threatenings, and the wrath to come, they would improve their seasons of grace, and flee to Christ for salvation.

2. Many trifle away their favourable seasons, by regarding death and eternity at many years' distance, promising themselves time enough to attend to the work of salvation ; while death cuts them short, and they are gone for ever.

3. Indulging sloth, in not attending with all diligence to the duties of religion, public and private ; instead of " working out their salvation with fear and trembling," and striving to " make their calling and election sure :" and thus, perhaps, from a mistaken idea of being found legal in their views and conduct, they expose themselves to all the curses of the law of God.

4. Love of carnal company and sensual delights. They are hereby drawn into idleness, gaming, drinking, foolish talking and jesting, and other sinful pleasures, whereby their summer days are trifled away and mispent. Foolish mortals ! one hour's enjoyment of Christ's presence and favour will yield more pleasure than years of sensual delight.

To conclude :

1. How dreadful will be the end of those who have lost all their opportunities of salvation ! All their past pursuits, carnal company, and pleasures, will give them no comfort in a dying hour : the very remembrance of them will increase their sorrow.

2. Such characters are evidently beside themselves, apparently destitute of reason, and below the very brutes that perish. These observe the proper season in providing for winter ; but they neglect theirs in providing for eternity. Jer. viii. 7. Prov. vi. 8.

3. If gospel seasons be the summer and harvest for our souls, let us endeavour to improve them with the greatest care. The husbandman observes his season for ploughing, sowing, and reaping ; the merchant his time for attending markets ; the mariner his time when the wind is fair for sailing ; and, oh ! let us attend to our harvest, and summer seasons, for saving our souls.

THE GLORY OF THE MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT.

How shall not, &c.—2 Cor. iii. 8.

IN this chapter the apostle compares the dispensation of the law with the dispensation of the gospel, and gives the most marked preference to the latter. The former had its glory ; a glorious minister, Moses. A terrible glory at the giving of the law ; thunderings, lightnings, and earthquake ; giving glorious gospel discoveries, by types and sacrifices : but the gospel dispensation excels in glory, making the way of salvation more clear and plain, and being attended with a greater effusion of the Spirit. "How shall," &c. I shall,

I. Premise some things concerning the nature and office of the Holy Spirit. And,

1. The term Spirit, is in the Hebrew *ruah*, and in the Greek *pneuma*, both signifying wind, air, or breathing. Sometimes it expresses the nature of God abstractedly, as in John iv. 24 ; but most commonly, it

signifies, as in the text, the third person in the Holy Trinity. Sometimes he is called the Spirit of the Father, and sometime: the Spirit of the Son, which shows their oneness, and that he proceeds from both.

2. Jesus Christ by his sufferings, has procured for us the agency of the Spirit, and hath sent him down to supply the want of his personal presence upon earth. John xvi. 7, 8.

3. The church, under the Old Testament, had a measure of the Spirit, on Christ's account: but the great effusion was reserved for New Testament times, and given after his ascension, according to the promise of the Father. Acts ii. 33. This was often foretold. Isa. xxxv. 6, 7; xlv. 3. Joel ii. 28, 29.

4. His great work is to apply the blessings of Christ's purchase to the soul. He leads into all truth. John xiv. 26; xvi. 13. Convinces of sin. John xvi. 8. Renews the soul. Tit. iii. 5. 1 Pet. i. 2. Subdues sin. Rom. viii. 13. Helps in prayer. Rom. viii. 26. Comforts and witnesses to our adoption. John xiv. 16. Rom. viii. 16.

5. Christ has taught us to pray for the Spirit as a special blessing. Luke xi. 9—13. Paul prays for it, for the Ephesians, iii. 16. Every grace is his fruit. Gal. v. 22.

II. When the gospel may be said to be the ministration of the Spirit to those who hear it.

1. When he makes a close and particular application of the reproofs and threatenings of the word to the sinner's conscience, saying, "Thou art the man." Then he is anxious about salvation. Acts ii. 37; xvi. 30. His questions then are not about health, the body, &c. but about salvation.

2. When the sinner is brought to despair of help and salvation from himself, his duties, performances, righteousness, &c.

3. When the flinty rock is turned into a waterpool. When the heart is melted down into streams of penitential tears for sin.

4. When it discovers the excellency of the remedy provided for lost sinners, the fulness and ability of Christ to save.

5. When convinced sinners are brought to close in with Christ for salvation, to accept of him in all his offices, and surrender themselves unto the Lord.

6. When Christians feel fresh life and vigour put into all their graces; faith, love, &c.

7. When they find the ordinances to be blessed means of communion and intercourse with God.

There have been some special seasons when the gospel has proved to be the ministration of the Spirit.

1. In the apostles' times, after Christ's ascension, this was promised. Luke xxiv. 49. Acts i. 8. And hence, by the preaching of a few poor illiterate men, the gospel, in twenty or thirty years, spread all over the vast Roman empire, making innumerable converts, both of Jews and Pagans.

2. At the reformation from popery. And how small the means! Luther's preaching against Texillius, for preaching up, and selling his indulgences: yet from this spark, a flame was kindled all over Europe, and the nations covered with darkness and superstition were brought into the light of truth.

3. In the church of Scotland, not only at the Reformation, but fre-

quently since. About the year 1625, in the parish of Stewarton, under the ministry of M^r. Dickson, many were converted to God, and which glorious work was called by the profane the Stewarton sickness. On June 20, 1630, when five hundred had a saving change wrought upon them under a sermon preached by Mr. Livingstone, at the kirk of Shots. And about the year 1740, great numbers were converted to God at Glasgow and its vicinity, especially at Cambuslang, Kilsyth, &c. under the ministry of the Rev. Messrs. Robe, Whitefield, M^cCulloch, &c.

4. In America, especially New England, where the work was "so inexpressibly glorious," as one says of it, "that it is impossible by words to make one who is not an eye-witness have just conceptions thereof." The Rev. Messrs. Edwards, Whitefield and Tennant, were the happy instruments of this blessed work.

III. How it will appear that the ministration of the Spirit is a glorious dispensation. And this will appear when we consider that all the blessings conveyed to us by that means proceed,

1. From a glorious Author, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the glorious Trinity, being the same in essence, and equal in power and glory. 1 John v. 7.

2. They cost a glorious price; they are the purchase of the Redeemer's blood; the blood of the God-man, Christ Jesus. Acts xx. 28.

3. They produce a glorious change in the hearts of those to whom they are communicated; make them new creatures; "all glorious within," the beauty of the Lord being upon them. Col. iii. 9, 10.

4. They prepare them for a glorious place: the city of the living God, the New Jerusalem, the palace of the great King: the society of glorious angels and glorious saints, and for glorious happiness, "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory." To conclude:

1. If we have reason to complain, that the preaching of the gospel with us is not the ministration of the Spirit, as we could wish it to be, let us examine and see if there is not a cause. The cause certainly is with us; let us humble ourselves, and put every thing from us which would hinder this glorious work.

2. But let us take care at the same time, not to undervalue the least droppings of the Spirit: these may be the forerunners of glorious show-ers; the cloud may appear at present but as a human hand, which will soon spread all around, and carry all before it.

3. Let us pray much for the ministration of the Spirit. Let us plead the multitude of the dry bones, for there is too general a deadness among both ministers and people; let us cry with the prophet, "Come from the four winds," &c. Ezek. xxxvii. 9. Let us plead our own inability to do this: ministers cannot do it; the people cannot do it. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase." Let us plead the promises to this purpose, Isa. xlv. 3. Ezek. xxxvi. 27. The Lord would have us turn these promises into prayers. Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

THE SPIRIT, THE COMFORTER, &C.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send &c.—Jn. xiv. 26.

WHEN our blessed Lord was about to ascend up into heaven, he assured his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit, to supply the

absence of his personal presence upon earth. The news of his departure filled their hearts with sorrow, but he comforts them with the promise of the Holy Ghost from whom they would derive many glorious advantages of instruction and consolation. John xiv. 16 ; xv. 26 ; xvi. 7, 13.

This promise was not confined to the apostles and believers of that day ; but extends to all in every age, as being necessary for all. Rom. viii. 9.

We shall therefore consider the various operations of the Holy Spirit in the minds of men, whereby they are trained up for a glorious immortality. And,

I. He convinces men of the evil and desert of sin. John xvi. 8. Of the guilt of sin, and the wrath of God, that is due to it ; so that those who before delighted in it, now abhor it, and flee from it, and review their past commission of it with dread and terror.

Some have been more deeply convinced than others, but all true believers have been so far awakened to a sight of guilt, danger, and misery, as to lead them to a living faith in the blood of Jesus Christ ; for it is only those who see themselves lost will seek after a Saviour, and embrace him by faith. Luke v. 31, 32.

The Spirit very often, in the conversion of sinners, impresses their minds with a sense of the evil of some particular sin which they have committed. Compare John xvi. 8, 9, with Acts ii. 22—38. And so by showing them their lost estate, he has enabled them to trust in Christ for salvation.

II. The Spirit unites sinners to Christ by faith, by which they are justified and sanctified.

They feel the heavy burden of sin lying upon them, and they are sensible that none but Christ can remove that load of guilt. 1 Pet. ii. 24. They trust in him for pardon, life, peace, and salvation, and accept of him by faith in all the characters of his grace, and this faith is produced by the power of God's Spirit ; Gal. v. 22 ; convincing not only of sin, but of righteousness, leading the soul to Christ for salvation. 1 Cor. xii. 3.

The Spirit is the author of that change in the soul, which in scripture is represented by the new birth ; and hence sinners are said to be born of the Spirit, John iii. 5 ; and to be saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. Tit. iii. 5.

This is the reason why he is called the Holy Spirit, Eph. iv. 30 ; Luke xi. 13. Ps. li. 11 ; not because he is more holy than the Father or the Son, but because he makes polluted sinners holy by his gracious influence upon their minds : their sanctification is ascribed to him, 2 Thess. ii. 13. 1 Pet. i. 2.

It is upon the same account that he is called the good Spirit, Ps. cxliii. 10. Neh. ix. 20 ; as all the good thoughts, and good desires towards God, which are in our hearts, were formed within us by his holy influence.

III. The Spirit dwells in the saints.

This was promised. Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

The Spirit dwells in the saints by his personal presence. 2 Tim. i. 14. 1 Cor. iii. 16. Rom. viii. 11.

There is a blessed union betwixt Christ and his people : he is the head, and they are the members ; and they have the same Spirit dwelling in them.

It is the same Spirit that raised up Christ from the dead, which has raised up his people "from a death of sin to a life of righteousness;" and will raise their bodies from the grave, to a life of immortal honour and glory.

And this indwelling of the Spirit is essentially necessary to form the Christian character. Rom. viii. 9.

IV. The Spirit is the teacher of the saints.

He reveals the things of God to sinners, making them wise to salvation. 1 Cor. ii. 10—14.

He gives the saints a clear and experimental knowledge of divine things; impresses the truths of religion upon their minds, memories, and hearts. John xiv. 26.

He teaches them the doctrines of the gospel in such a manner, that they believe and embrace them:

The promises of the gospel in such a manner that they rely upon them:

And the commands of God in such a manner, as to induce them to keep and obey them. Ezek. xxxvi. 27.

V. The Spirit is the leader and guide of the saints; they are all under the conduct of the Spirit. Rom. viii. 14. John xvi. 13.

He not only leads them into all truth, but implants in their minds a propension to divine things, leading them to walk in the ways of God; and imparting divine strength, however feeble in themselves.

He guides them in difficult cases. Jer. x. 23; teaching them to apply the promises to their own particular cases, and to direct their conduct, saying, "This is the way," &c. Isa. xxx. 21.

VI. The Spirit increases their life of faith and holiness.

He relieves the weakness of the saints, and furnishes them with fresh supplies of strength and power: thus prays St. Paul. Eph. iii. 16.

He supports them under all their trials, temptations, and spiritual conflicts: hence the prayer of David. Ps. li. 12.

They received their life of grace at first from the Spirit; John iii. 5; and it is under his influence that they grow in grace, and are "changed from glory to glory." 2 Cor. iii. 18.

VII. The Spirit assists the saints in their several acts of worship.

In reading, in hearing, in meditating on the word of God, he opens their understanding to understand the scriptures.

In prayer, especially, that they may have access to the Father; Eph. ii. 18; and enlarging their hearts in their approaches to him, giving them a holy freedom in that blessed work. 2 Cor. iii. 17.

He is within them, crying, Abba, Father; Gal. iv. 6; enabling them to pray to the Holy Ghost; Jude ver. 20; and making intercessions for them, &c. Rom. viii. 26.

VIII. The Spirit of God is the comforter of the saints. He is called the Comforter in the text, and in John xiv. 16; xv. 26; xvi. 7.

And his blessed influence upon the soul is called "joy in the Holy Ghost;" Rom. xiv. 17; "joy of the Holy Ghost;" 1 Thess. i. 6; and "comfort of the Holy Ghost." Acts ix. 31.

He opens the springs of comfort, to refresh the sorrowful saints, by witnessing to the work which God has wrought within them. 1 Cor. ii. 12.

That Christ abideth in them. 1 John iii. 24. That they are his adopted children, and a part of his family. Rom. viii. 16.

IX. The children of God are sealed by his Spirit. Eph. i. 13 ; iv. 30 ; 2 Cor. i. 22. Hence,

They bear his likeness, being impressed with the Spirit's seal ; Job xxxviii. 14 ; and it is his kind work to make them more like unto him. 2 Cor. iii. 18.

Things are sealed that are to be kept secret ; Dan. xii. 4 ; and their joy a stranger intermeddleth not with.

A seal is used to confirm a covenant. Neh. ix. 38. God has made an everlasting covenant with his saints. Isa. lv. 3. They are to be his people, and he has engaged to be their God. Jer. xxx. 22.

It is also used by men to distinguish their property from that of others, in order to its security. Deut. xxxii. 34. Rev. vii. 3. And the saints, by this seal of the Spirit, are distinguished from the carnal and vain world ; and they are the Lord's in a very peculiar sense ; they are his sons, and the heirs of heaven. Rom. viii. 17 ; Deut. xxxii. 9.

It shows also the great value that God puts upon them, for it is only things of value that are sealed ; and the saints are his jewels, his treasure and his portion. Mal. iii. 17 ; Ex. xix. 5.

X. God gives his Spirit to the saints, as an earnest of heaven. Eph. i. 14. 2 Cor. i. 22 ; v. 5.

An earnest is a part of what is promised in a contract, and is given beforehand to ratify and confirm it, as a security that the whole promise should be fulfilled.

God has promised the kingdom of heaven to his followers, and they are heirs to it while they are waiting for it. Rom. viii. 23.

They have already got the first fruits of it ; the beginnings of heaven in their souls, in the gifts, graces, and comforts of the Holy Ghost ; which indeed is but small, when compared with the exceeding glory which awaits them. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

In the great day he will raise the bodies of the saints from their graves. Rom. viii. 11. He will adorn both their souls and their bodies with eternal beauty and glory, and fill all the sons of God with ineffable consolation in the kingdom of heaven for ever.

THE

INCREASE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

He must increase.—John iii. 30.

THESE are the words of John the Baptist, in answer to a complaint which his disciples made concerning Christ, who, it appears, was baptizing great multitudes ; ver. 26 : afraid, perhaps, that he would eclipse the glory of their master. John tells them, that he had told them before that he was not the Messiah, but his forerunner ; and that now he was come, his joy was fulfilled. Ver. 29. "He," says he, "must increase." I shall consider,

I. What the increase of Christ's kingdom and glory is which we are to expect.

It is the increase of his mediatorial kingdom, and the manifestation of his glory in the world. This implies :

1. The spread of gospel light through the world. It is in this way the man of sin is to be destroyed, 2 Thess. ii. 8 ; and the earth filled with heavenly knowledge. Hab. ii. 14.

2. That many burning and shining lights will be employed for this purpose : men full of holy fire and zeal for God, willing to run all hazards, by sea and land, to spread the glory of Christ. Dan. xii. 4.

3. That the number of Christ's subjects shall be greatly increased : this will be to his honour. Prov. xiv. 28. His arrows will be sharp in the hearts of his enemies, and his converts numerous as the drops of dew. Ps. cx. 2, 3.

4. That truth shall triumph over error : that infidelity, deism, Arianism, Socinianism, and popery, with all its superstition, shall then give way before the blaze of the Sun of Righteousness. Mal. iv. 2.

5. The increase of true piety, when the followers of Christ shall be wholly devoted to him : manifesting holy tempers, holy conversation, and a holy life. Eph. v. 1, 2.

6. An increase of zeal and public spirit among Christians. They shall boldly confess Christ before men ; use every resource, and exert all their powers, to promote the good of mankind. Gal. iv. 18.

II. The times and seasons of this glorious increase.

1. The apostolic age was the most remarkable time that was ever known ; when every sermon made new conquests and additions to the church, till every city and corner of the vast Roman empire was filled with Christians. But,

2. We have promises of a more full and glorious increase of Christ's kingdom in the latter day, or towards the end of the world. Dan. ii. 28—44 ; vii. 27.

The image represents the four grand monarchies. The Babylonian, is the golden head ; the Medo-Persian, the breast and arms of silver ; the Macedonian or Grecian, the belly and thighs of brass ; and the Roman, the legs of iron, &c. which was to break and bruise all the rest ; Dan. ii. 40 ; but, in its last stage, was itself to be divided into ten lesser kingdoms, represented by the ten toes ; and in another vision, by ten horns. Chap. vii. and Rev. xvii.

Then follows the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. This is the stone mentioned in Dan. ii. 34, which is to become a great mountain and fill the world, ver. 35. A kingdom which will swallow up all others, and be established for ever. Ver. 44.

These ten toes, horns, or kings, shall oppose the Lamb in his grand designs ; but he shall overcome them by the word of his power, and shall range themselves under his banner ; shall hate the whore of Babylon, the church of Rome, and make her desolate. Rev. xvii. 12—16.

Then shall the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of Christ. Rev. xi. 15.

The great river Euphrates will be dried up, to prepare the way for the kings of the East. Rev. xvi. 12.

The blindness of the Jews will be removed, and the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in. Rom. xi. 1, 25, 26.

Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and be holy. Isa. lx. 10, 12, 13, 21.

The Jews shall be gathered out of all countries where they are dispersed. Ezek. xxxvi. 24, 28.

All nations shall be gathered together to see his glory. Isa. ii. 2.

There shall be no more war betwixt nations. Isa. ii. 4.

When these prophecies are fulfilled what a glorious increase will it be to the Mediator's kingdom and glory! Then shall be accomplished the overthrow of Babylon and Antichrist, the destruction of the Turkish empire, the bringing in of the Jews, with the fulness of the Gentiles.

Glorious period! and we have ground to expect that we are arrived at the eve of that eventful period. Hence the establishment of Bible and Missionary Societies, and the lively interest which rich and poor, and even crowned heads, are taking in the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth: indeed, such a public spirit for doing good was never before, to the same extent, witnessed in the Christian world. This appears to be the dawn of a glorious day.

But previous to this glorious event, there will be,

1. A very general defection in the churches of Christ; 2 Pet. ii. 1; which, in many instances, is awfully the case already.

2. There will be great numbers of infidels, and profane scoffers, deriding serious godliness, and contemning the promises. 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

3. Great troubles in the world, and great fear and distress in the church. Dan. xii. 1; also Matt. xxiv. and Luke xxi.

4. Great security among the enemies of Christ, and the Romish harlot is lifted up with pride. Rev. xvii. 7, 8.

5. A marvellous revolution in one of the ten horns, Rev. xi. 13, or one of the ten kingdoms: this is understood by many of the kingdom of France. Then shall Christ arise and his enemies be scattered.

III. The reasons why Christ must increase.

1. Because it is the purpose and promise of God. Promised to the church. Jer. xxiii. 5. To Christ himself. Ps. ii. 8; and cx. 1, 2. And he will not alter. Ps. lxxxix. 34, 35.

2. Because for this very purpose God made the world, and he hath committed to Christ the administration of providence. Isa. ix. 6. To secure the accomplishment of the glorious promises. Matt. xxviii. 18. Eph. i. 22.

3. Because Christ is the beloved of the Father. Matt. iii. 17. He fulfilled his will in the redemption of the world. Phil. ii. 8. And has obtained a name above every name, &c. Phil. ii. 8—10. To conclude, I would observe,

1. Under these circumstances it is in vain for any one to attempt to stop this glorious work. "He must increase." Ps. ii. 1—4.

2. What encouragement we have to pray, as our Lord directs, "Thy kingdom come!"

3. How encouraging is the prospect to the friends of Christ! The church will outlive all its enemies. Christ must overcome, he must triumph.

4. And let every one, in their different spheres of action, do all they can to increase the Redeemer's glory. Dreadful shall be the state of those who are unconcerned in this great work. Amos vi. 1, 6. Esther iv. 14.

THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.

Ethiopia shall soon stretch out, &c.—Ps. lxxviii. 31.

THESE words contain a most important prediction of the success of the gospel of Jesus Christ among the idolatrous Ethiopians and other gentile nations, who have been for many generations stretching out their hands unto strange gods; but now, upon the gospel being preached to them, they are here represented as stretching out their hands to the true and living God. “Ethiopia,” &c. I shall,

I. Take a view of the state of sinners without the gospel, or before the grace and power of it reached their hearts.

To see this, we have only to advert to the state of the gentile nations, while destitute of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as described by St. Paul, Eph. ii. 1—3, 11, 12. From which it appears, that sinners are in a deplorable state without God, the chief good; without Christ, the only Saviour; without the hope of salvation; without the true church, where life and immortality are brought to light; without God’s covenant of promise, which is the only charter of salvation: under the power of sin and Satan, the great enemies of their salvation; and, consequently, in a state of hostility against God.

II. The power of Divine grace accompanying the preaching of the gospel, whereby sinners, like the Ethiopians, are led to “stretch out their hands unto God.”

1. The preaching of the gospel is the means that God has appointed for the conversion and salvation of sinners. Rom. i. 16. 1 Cor. i. 21.

2. The power of God, accompanying the preaching of the gospel, is an “exceeding great and mighty power.” Eph. i. 18—20.

3. This power is exerted in a mysterious way. There is a glorious mystery in its contrivance, purchase and application. John iii. 8.

4. It is wholly supernatural. Rom. ix. 16.

5. It is irresistible; especially in its first energies upon the soul. It comes upon the sinner like lightning, and he might as well attempt to stop the one as the other. 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

6. It effects a universal change upon the soul, without noise or din: hence compared to the dew; the spreading of leaven; the outgoings of the light in the morning; to the growth of corn and grass.

III. What is implied in “stretching out the hand unto God?” This is to be understood of the act of believing, and implies,

1. Divine illumination in the “knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Gal. i. 16. 2 Cor. iv. 6. This is the radical act of faith; hence faith is expressed by it. Isa. liii. 11. John xvii. 3.

2. An assent of the soul to the record of God concerning Christ. 1 Tim. i. 15.

3. An act of admiration. What wonder fills the soul, when beholding the glory of Christ in his person, mediation, incarnation, mercy, grace, &c. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

4. An act of renunciation, abjuring all rivals that would usurp the throne of the heart, Isa. xxvi. 13. Hos. xiv. 3. Jer. iii. 23.

5. An act of strong and fervent affection; when our affections are

moved with love, desire, delight, we are ready to express it by the lifting up of the hand. Isa. xxvi. 9.

6. An act of appropriation and application. It brings Christ home to the heart as our infinite good, as the soul's portion and happiness. Ex. xv. 2. Ps. xlviii. 14. Zech. xiii. 9.

7. An open profession of the faith in Christ before the world, angels, men, and devils. Avouch the Lord to be their God, with the solemnity of an oath, or covenant, as Israel did. Josh. xxiv. 22.

IV. For what ends and purposes sinners are to stretch out their hands unto God.

1. As lost, helpless, undone sinners, that he may help and save them from perishing. Hos. xiii. 9.

2. As guilty criminals condemned to death, to receive the King's pardon, according to the promise. Isa. xliii. 25. He will say with David, "If thou." Ps. cxxx. 3, 4. "God be merciful to me a sinner!" So David, Ps. li. 1.

3. As humble supplicants, to receive mercy and grace to help in time of need. Zeph. iii. 10. James i. 5. Heb. iv. 14—16.

4. As a servant, that he may appoint him his work, and do his commandments. Acts ix. 6.

5. As a soldier, to fight the Lord's battles against sin, Satan, and the world. Ps. cxxxix. 21.

6. As a blind creature, to be guided in the good and acceptable way. Isa. xlii. 16. Ps. xxv. 8.

7. As a distressed child to a tender-hearted father. Jer. iii. 4. See also the case of the prodigal, Luke xv. and of Ephraim, Jer. xxxi. 19, 20.

8. In all these respects will the gentile nations stretch out their hands to God. Isa. xl. 3—5.

9. And this will soon be the case; the time is at hand; the spreading of scripture knowledge, and the preaching of the gospel, doubtless will be the mighty engines employed to accomplish this grand event, and the exertions making in our day, with a view to this, have never been equalled since the days of the apostles.

I shall close this subject by some improvement of it, and hence we may see,

1. That there is a door of faith and hope opened for all sorts of sinners, however black or vile they may be. Ps. lxviii. 13. For sinners of all sorts have been called and brought to the Lord Jesus Christ, who came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Matt. ix. 13.

2. The folly and danger of unbelief, which is a drawing back the hand from God. Zech. vii. 12. Job xxi. 14. How many of this description sit under the gospel! But let such remember that God will highly resent it. Prov. i. 24—27. The Ethiopians will rise in judgment against such.

3. The encouragement held out to praying saints. "The desire of their heart shall be granted them." The dominion of Christ shall yet be universal; it shall extend from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth, even to the uttermost bounds of the everlasting hills.

THE WORD MADE EFFECTUAL BY THE DIVINE BLESSING.

And they went forth, &c.—Mark xvi. 20.

THE words of the text are the conclusion of the preceding gospel. We read just before them, of our Lord giving a commission to his disciples to “go into all the world,” &c. and that having thus spoken, he was received up into heaven, &c. and then we come to our text, in which we find the disciples entering upon their great work, and experiencing the promises that were made to them of the Lord’s working with them, and confirming their doctrine by signs and wonders. “They went forth,” &c.

In discoursing upon this subject, I shall show,

I. That in preaching the word, a divine operation may be expected to attend it.

This will appear if we consider,

1. That it is promised. Our blessed Lord, before his departure from his disciples, gave them a promise to this purpose. Matt. xxviii. 20. “With you,” to render your ministrations successful. Before his crucifixion, he gave them a promise to the same purpose. Matt. x. 19, 20. And the Spirit is promised to the same effect. Prov. i. 23.

2. It has been experienced. This was the case in the primitive days in a very blessed manner. So the text tells us. See the good effects of Peter’s sermon. Acts x. 44. And also the word of others. Acts xi. 21. This was the case also with St. Paul. 2 Tim. iv. 17. And how many, in later times, and within our own knowledge, have experienced the same blessed influence to the conversion of their souls!

II. The necessity of such an influence; and it is necessary,

1. Because of the greatness of the work which the word has to do. It has the empire of Satan to bring down, and the kingdom of Christ to erect and establish; it has the sinner’s heart to turn, to convince gain-sayers, draw men against the stream of interest, pleasure, the world, carnal affections, &c. 2 Cor. ii. 16; iii. 5, 6. There is our strength and hope of success.

2. Because of the weakness of the word without it. It could never of itself release one soul, or gain one convert; it is only effectual when it is a word in God’s mouth, and when it is a weapon in his hand. 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. Paul could do nothing without this power. 1 Cor. xv. 10; ix. 16.

3. For the encouragement of Christians in their attendance on the word. What encouragement would you have to attend ordinances, if there were no promises of Christ’s presence there? How could man speak to your consciences without God’s Spirit? How could he search your hearts—how beget spiritual joy? Or witness to your pardon? &c. All depends on the word of the Lord.

4. To secure all the honour of what is done to God. If a soul is converted to God, he has the honour of it, &c. As Joab sent to David to come and take the honour of it, when he had conquered a city; so this doctrine calls on God to come and take the honour of it, when any

great work is done by the word. 1 Cor. i. 31. So the prophet says, Isa. lxi. 3.

III. The great and excellent effects that are produced thereby.

1. When the Lord works along with his word, then it is an enlightening word. Then light comes out of it, as sparks do out of the flint when it is struck : our understandings are opened ; the veil is taken away that hid them from the wisdom of God, the excellency of his grace, the beauty of Jesus. It is with us as it was with the apostle. Acts ix. 17, 18.

2. A searching word. It searches the hearts and consciences, and most secret recesses. It finds out the sinner, although he may attempt to conceal himself. It brings his sins to his remembrance, and makes him cry to be delivered from them. It fully answers what is said of it. Heb. iv. 12.

3. It is a conquering word. It overthrows all opposition. It conquers in all places ; in the most rough and untractable, in the most dark and ignorant parts. How did it run from one city and land to another, when first preached ! 2 Cor. ii. 14. It soon subdued distant nations to the faith of Christ. Acts xvii. 1, 2. The priests also. Acts vi. 7.

4. It is a strengthening word ; giving spiritual strength to a believing soul. It performs that command. Isa. xxxv. 3. It can turn the weak, timorous Christian into a champion for Christ. It can strengthen to every good work. 2 Tim. iii. 17. To overcome the wicked one. 1 John ii. 14. It strengthens every Christian grace, and kindles love into a flame.

5. It is a comforting word. Full of heavenly joy, as the sea is of water, or the sun is of light. Ps. cxix. 50. Rom. xv. 4. It comforts under all bodily pains and infirmities ; outward wants, losses, and disappointments ; under spiritual troubles and dejections, even the greatest and the heaviest. It comforts in every stage of life, and its consolations abide even in death itself. A kind promise applied makes us go off as triumphing warriors go out of the field of battle.

I shall now apply the subject. And,

1. Whenever you attend the preaching of the word, pray that the Lord would work with it. Look up for that influence, operation, and blessing, without which Paul may plant, and Apollos water in vain.

2. When you have found the power of God attending his ordinances, praise his name for it ; for it is his power that renders them effectual to salvation. We are nothing, and he is all. Jordan's waters could not heal Naaman, if God's power had not been there ; nor could Siloam's pool help any, without the angel moving in it. May the Lord bless his own word, to the conversion of us all ! Amen.

A DOOR OF HOPE OPENED FOR THE GREATEST SINNERS.

Let the wicked forsake his way, &c.—Isa. lv. 7.

It is a melancholy fact, that we have all transgressed the holy law of God, and incurred its dreadful penalty, and if God were to proceed

against us in the way of strict justice, we should all be cast down to hell; but the Lord, in rich mercy to a guilty world, has found out a way, through the death of his Son, to be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly who believe in Christ Jesus.

Hence it is, that he calls his wandering, wicked creatures to himself, saying, "Let the wicked," &c. Consider,

I. The characters of the persons here addressed. The wicked and the unrighteous.

1. The wicked, and there can be no difficulty in understanding who they are. When we see mankind drinking to excess, blaspheming God's holy name, profaning his sabbaths, practising falsehood and deceit, unjust in their dealings, unchaste in their conversation and conduct, we say with pious David, "the transgression of the wicked," &c. Ps. xxxvi. 1—4.

2. The unrighteous, and if there be any difference it relates to practice, the wicked being more openly profane than the unrighteous: the one carrying the mark of the beast in his forehead, proclaiming his sin as Sodom; the other, in his right hand: yet are they alike, in that they are both strangers and enemies to God; unpardoned, unregenerated, without God, and without hope. Eph. ii. 12. And altogether unfit for the kingdom of God. 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

3. Hence their ways and thoughts are sinful, proceeding from a sinful depraved heart, a heart that is deceitful, &c. Jer. xvii. 9.

4. And as they are sinful, so they are miserable. Their ways are hard. Prov. xiii. 15. They have no solid peace, comfort, or satisfaction. Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

5. The reward of such impiety shall be of the most dreadful kind. God is displeased with them. Ps. vii. 11. They are reserved for destruction. Job xxi. 30. And if they die such, shall be turned into hell. Ps. ix. 17.

II. The merciful call of God to such as are here expressed: they are to "return unto the Lord." And this they are to do,

1. By bringing forth fruits meet for repentance; by ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. Matt. iii. 8. Isa. i. 16, 17. They are to forsake their ways and thoughts. See the text.

2. They are to repent of their sins, and return to God with mourning. Joel ii. 12, 13. Jer. l. 4, 5.

3. They are to confess their sins to God. Ps. xxxii. 5. 1 John i. 9.

4. They are to pray for the extension of his mercy. See pious David. Ps. cxvi. 3, 4. The publican. Luke xviii. 13. Saul of Tarsus. Acts ix. 6.

5. They are to believe in Christ, as their only, all-sufficient Saviour, who hath died for their sins, and is set forth in the gospel as their great propitiation. Rom. iii. 25.

These are the various steps by which sinners are to return to God.

III. The encouragement here given, in order to engage their return. God will have mercy, and abundantly pardon.

1. He will forgive their sins, however many, abundantly pardon, and remit the punishment their sins have merited. Jer. xxxiii. 8. John v. 24. Save them by the washing of regeneration, Tit. iii. 5; and thus

prepare them for his everlasting kingdom : and this we are encouraged to expect,

2. Inasmuch as mercy is the most amiable attribute of his nature : all his paths are mercy and truth. Ps. xxv. 10. Whose mercy is everlasting, &c. Ps. ciii. 17. Endureth for ever. Ps. cvi. 1. Plenteous in mercy. Ps. ciii. 8. Delighting in mercy. Mic. vii. 18. His mercies are tender. Ps. xxv. 6. Abundant. 1 Pet. i. 3. Rich in mercy. Eph. ii. 4. Great in mercy. Ps. ciii. 11.

3. And is called the Father of mercies. 2 Cor. i. 3. Keeping mercy for thousands. Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7.

4. The merit of Christ's blood is infinite. It extends to the greatest offenders, both as to magnitude and number. It reaches to all, even the vilest of the vile. He was God, as well as man, and hence his blood is called the blood of God. Acts xx. 28. He can save to the uttermost. Heb. vii. 25. And his blood can cleanse from all sin. 1 John i. 7.

5. Sinners are kindly invited, in the word of God, to trust in his mercy. Isa. lv. 1—3 ; and, although they have refused for a long time to comply with the invitations of Divine mercy, yet still he invites them. Prov. i. 20—23. He invites the thirsty soul to come to him and drink. John vii. 37. Rev. xxii. 17. The weary to obtain rest. Matt. xi. 28. To open the door and give him admittance. Rev. iii. 20.

6. The Lord promises mercy and forgiveness to returning sinners. That their sins which are as scarlet, shall be as wool. Isa. i. 18. That he will remember their iniquities no more. Heb. viii. 10, 12. That their sins shall be blotted out. Acts iii. 19. And cast all their sins into the depth of the sea. Mic. vii. 18, 19. What a solid foundation are these gracious promises for the faith and hope of returning sinners !

7. Some of the greatest offenders have obtained mercy and salvation from God. The word of God exhibits many instances of this kind.

Manasseh was a person of prodigious impiety. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 1—9. But upon his humiliation and supplication he was again received into the Divine favour. Verses 12, 13. Zaccheus and Matthew were publicans, avaricious and oppressive, yet they were forgiven. Matt. x. 3. Luke xix. 5. Mary Magdalene, who had seven devils in her, was changed by divine grace. Luke viii. 2. Paul was a blasphemer, &c. but he obtained mercy. 1 Tim. i. 12—15. Many of the Jews who crucified Christ, were pardoned and saved. Acts ii. 22—41. The Ephesians, who were dead in sin, and addicted to the use of curious arts, were quickened, saved, and burned their books in detestation of their former wickedness. Eph. ii. 1—5 ; and Acts xix. 19. The Cretans, who were foolish and disobedient, were renewed and made heirs of eternal life. Tit. iii. 3—7. Many of the Corinthians, who had been fornicators, &c. were pardoned, justified, &c. 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

Application :

1. There is no ground for sinners to despair of obtaining the pardon of their sins, if they are but willing to rely on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

He delights to show mercy, and rejoices in the recovery and salvation of lost sinners. The very name of God is mercy, and therefore sinners ought to trust in him. Ps. ix. 10.

The Lord has appointed his ministers to publish the riches of his grace, and invite poor perishing sinners to come to him and be saved. Acts xxvi. 18.

2. Let not the sinner be discouraged, if he feels the guilt of sin lying heavy on his soul, and the terrors of God making him afraid; for this is God's method in saving sinners. The three thousand were pricked in their hearts, before they believed. Acts ii. 37, 41. Paul was awakened to a sense of his danger, and trembled before he obtained mercy. Acts ix. 4—6. Also the gaoler. Acts xvi. 29, 30. God first discovers to the sinner the curses of the broken law, which he has deserved, before he refreshes with the consolations of the gospel; he opens the wound which sin has made in the soul, before he applies the rich balsam of Christ's blood to heal and cure it.

3. Let the saints adore and praise God for his pardoning mercy and saving grace. What a blessing is the pardon of sin! How happy are they who are saved from the wrath to come! O ye humble believers, though the world reproach you, though Satan accuse you, and God afflict you, yet you are in a happy condition, for God has pardoned all your sins, and cast them into the depths of the sea: he will sanctify all the events of his providence to the good of your souls, guide you by his counsel, and afterwards receive you into the kingdom of heaven.

Let every pardoned saint then say, "Bless the Lord," &c. Ps. ciii. 1—4.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and praise his name for ever!"

THE IMPORTANT INQUIRY.

And brought them out, &c.—Acts xvi. 30.

THESE are the words of the Philippian gaoler: they were addressed to Paul and Silas, who at that time were his prisoners. They prayed and sang praises to God at midnight: the Lord sent an earthquake; the foundation of the prison was shaken; the prisoners' chains fell off and the gaoler was awakened, not only out of his natural sleep, but also from the sleep of sin, and inquires what he must do to be saved. I shall,

I. Inquire what this question implies and contains.

1. That the power of the eternal God was exerted. It was the Lord that opened the heart of Lydia; verse 14; and the Lord opened the heart of this rough gaoler, too. There must be an Almighty power to make dead men, or dry bones, live. Eph. ii. 1.

2. A sense of his woful condition. Sin now appears in its proper colours: no bright ray in the picture; it is all a sable hue: terror fills his conscience; he is afraid of Divine wrath. His treatment of the apostles might particularly impress his mind. God generally singles out some particular sin to work by, and impresses that upon the conscience. In one person it may be sabbath-breaking, &c.

3. A conviction of his own inability to save himself. If he had thought he could have procured salvation by any means of his own, what need to have sought it of them? Nay, certainly he would not have applied to them. Jer. x. 23.

4. A persuasion of the importance and necessity of salvation. If this had not been the case, he would not have inquired with such earnestness about it. He does not now look upon it as a light matter, as most likely he did before, when he treated the apostles with such scorn and indignity. Verse 24.

5. That he had now a high regard for the apostles. It is not now, "Ye rebels, traitors, stirrers up of sedition, impostors," &c. but, "Sirs." He was convinced God was with them, and that they taught the way of God in truth. He was led to them as the ministers of Christ, and to acknowledge them in their work, to listen and hearken to them.

6. An earnest desire for the salvation of his soul: not what shall I do to maintain my reputation, and preserve my character amongst those on whom I depend, &c. but, "What must I do to be saved?" Thousands are pursuing after the world, &c. &c. but the soul is the most precious of all; yet few care for it.

7. That he was not in the way of salvation previous thereto, but in the way to eternal ruin: his language is similar to Paul's, when the Lord met him threatening slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Acts ix. 6. What course shall I take? How would you direct me? Is there any way by which I may escape? What is to be done, to be believed, to be received, that I may be saved? I proceed,

II. To inquire what is intended by this salvation, which he so earnestly seeks after? It is not a temporal salvation, so much as an eternal one; not a salvation respecting his body, so much as his soul. Now this consists in several particulars.

1. It is a salvation from the guilt of sin. This now lies with weight upon his conscience: it is a sword in his bones; a vulture that gnaws his liver. He now wants peace, pardon, and salvation. This is to be obtained by the blood of Christ. Eph. i. 7.

2. A freedom from the wrath of God. He now appears to the awakened sinner as a consuming fire; the wrath of God and eternal burnings are before him. It saves from wrath. 1 Thess. i. 10. It is wrath to come, and ever will be so: awful thought! Advance as far as you can into eternity, still it is wrath to come.

3. From the power and dominion of sin. He is turned from the power of Satan unto God: sin is now loathsome to him, and what he abhors and dreads. Rom. vi. 14.

4. Justification before God. A saved soul is a justified one. Rom. v. 1, 8, 13. There is no condemnation to him. Rom. viii. 1. John iii. 18.

5. The being brought into the family of heaven. Now a child of God; no more a servant, but a son, an heir of God through Christ. Gal. iv. 6, 7. Thus the apostle prays to the Father, "of whom," &c. Eph. iii. 15.

6. Communion with God himself. He has converse with Heaven; is near to the Lord; can tell him his case with a holy liberty. 1 John i. 3.

7. Eternal glory. So the expression of the apostle. 2 Tim. ii. 10. Called "an inheritance of the saints in light;" "an inheritance incorruptible," &c. 1 Pet. i. 4. It is represented as a "crown," a "crown of life," a "crown of righteousness," a "crown of glory." Under all these sublime metaphorical representations have we salvation, in its summation, set before us.

I shall now close this subject by some improvement of it. And,

1. We may learn, from what has been said, that some people have the word of God preached to them, without any saving efficacy upon them. 2 Cor. iv. 3. O take heed that ye are not mere hearers of the word, but doers of it also!

2. We may here see the ordinary methods of God's working. He usually brings men to a sense of sin, leads them into a view of their condition, sets forth the law before them in its spirituality and power. "I was alive," &c. Rom. vii. 9. "When the law came in its power, when the law was edged by the Spirit of God it slew me; I saw I was guilty before God." Thus he wrought with Paul, and he does so now.

3. That the grand inquiry of the awakened soul is about salvation. "What must I do," &c. Do you attend the word, read the word, converse with Christians, to this end, that you may have satisfaction upon this question?

4. How is it with us who profess to have believed? What is the fruit of our faith? Are we made humble? Are we led into an admiring view of the grace and love of God towards us poor sinners? Are we made thankful? Do we bless his name? Has he done such things for us? Made us see? Has he opened our hearts? Do we love him? Are we fruitful, and concerned to live more to his glory? If so, we should be thankful, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

SALVATION BY FAITH IN CHRIST.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, &c.—Acts xvi. 31.

HOWEVER careless ignorant and wicked men may be about their souls, when once a man is convinced that he is a sinner, and must answer to God for his crimes, he will anxiously inquire after salvation. While others are inquiring, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, wherewithal shall we be clothed, what new entertainment shall we see, what company shall we go into?" &c. such a one will say, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer in this case is a blessed one: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," &c.

I shall consider,

1. What this faith or believing is, whereof cometh salvation.

These words are the words of God authorized from heaven; "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," &c. I know this by many is counted the cant of a party: it is looked upon as a peculiar phraseology of some distempered enthusiastic brain. But if God is true, these words are true; look ye to it. If thou believest, thou shalt be saved; if not, thou shalt be damned.

1. Believing implies more than merely owning Jesus to be the Messiah; that he came to explain the law; to give refined rules as to our conduct in the world; and to confirm the truths he taught by his death. The scriptures speak of him as a foundation; 1 Cor. iii. 11; as our wisdom, &c. 1 Cor. i. 30; made sin for us, &c. 2. Cor. v. 21.

2. It is more than a mere belief that Jesus is the Saviour; "the devils

believe and tremble." The report may be believed as good, without any personal application of Christ to the soul. James ii. 19.

3. It is a receiving Christ with our whole heart for every purpose of salvation. Rom. x. 10. John i. 12. Depending wholly upon his sacrifice for pardon, acceptance, and eternal life. Rom. iii. 25.

II. How are we to consider the great object of our faith, in relation to salvation?

We are to believe on, or in the Lord Jesus Christ: that is,

1. In his Deity, his Godhead; as "God over all, blessed for ever." He is Jehovah, the universal cause of all things. One with the Father. John x. 30. And gave full proof of it, by the power he manifested in his miracles.

2. In his character as Mediator. Thus Christ is to be considered as the way to the Father. So I may say all these terms, Lord, Jesus, Christ, make up and constitute his character. 1 Tim. ii. 5.

The first bespeaks his sovereign authority and rule: he is "both Lord and Christ," "has all power in heaven and earth."

Jesus: here is his official character; the name that speaks the end of his coming into the world. Matt. i. 21.

Christ: here is his authority in his investiture. He is appointed by God to be the Saviour of the world, filled with his Spirit in all immeasurable fulness. Christ imports the Lord's anointed. The whole work of saving sinners was committed to him.

III. What is the salvation here promised, with some of its properties.

In general, it is all salvation, the utmost that the soul of man can want or desire. It runs through time, and it runs into eternity: it is salvation with eternal glory. 2 Tim. ii. 10. The gaoler did not inquire how his house might be saved from falling, or himself and family from ruin, or run out of the house, as persons do in an earthquake. His inquiry was about the salvation of his soul; and hence the propriety of the answer in the text, "Believe," &c. That is,

1. Thy sins shall be pardoned. It is the first blessing perceived by us in redemption. Eph. i. 7. It is stipulated in the covenant. Isa. xliii. 25. Jer. xxxi. 33, 34. Peter declares the same thing. Acts xiii. 38. It is the grand design of the gospel ministry. Acts xxvi. 18.

2. To be saved, is to be justified; Acts xiii. 39; and freed from condemnation; Rom. viii. 1; and entitled to eternal life. Christ came for this purpose. John x. 10. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.

3. To be saved, is to be brought into a new relation; Gal. iii. 26; Christ is the head of the family, the first-born of the sons; in his right, believers are children, they are adopted in him.

4. To be saved, is to have the inhabitation of the Spirit as a sanctifier; Rom. viii. 9; as a Comforter, to lead into all truth. To seal, to witness to our adoption, to become the earnest of our inheritance.

5. It includes eternal glory, or being brought into the blissful presence of God. Saved in body and soul, when time shall be no more; and "so shall be for ever with the Lord."

This salvation has a variety of properties and excellences. As,

1. It is a free salvation, unmerited, undeserved. It is by grace. Eph. ii. 8. Tit. iii. 4, 5. It is the effect of Divine mercy.

2. It is a full salvation; a review of what has been said, will show this; it is a salvation from all sin, from all misery, from all evil; it is a salvation unto all good, all happiness, all glory. Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

3. It is a spiritual salvation; it principally relates to the soul. When sin entered into the world, the Divine image was defaced; when grace comes to the heart, the Divine image is renewed. Eph. ii. 10.

4. It is a great salvation; great as to the author and giver, God himself: its procurer and purchaser, Jesus Christ, God-man, Mediator. The price given for it was no less than the life and blood of the Son of God; the whole of his obedience unto death: infinite price! Great in the way of its application, by the Spirit of God himself. Great in the blessings themselves: they are a kingdom, an inheritance, a crown of glory; it is all joy, it is fulness of joy, satisfaction and delight. It is the Lord's own likeness; in a word, God, thy God, thy glory—God who is all and in all. Heb. ii. 3.

To conclude. From what has been said,

1. Learn the amazing grace of God. Will God take poor guilty wretches, and save them by his own beloved Son? Will he save them in a way of believing, where all is free and easy? The poorest sinner in the world is as well adapted to receive Christ, and complete salvation by him, as the greatest prince on earth.

2. How awful is the condition of those who live and die without faith! the wrath of God abideth upon them. John iii. 36. They shall be damned. Mark xvi. 16.

3. We may hence see the use of faith in salvation. It is the hand, the eye, the foot, the mouth of the soul. Hereby Christ and all his benefits are received.

4. True faith makes a mighty and universal change: the man is turned from darkness to light, from the power of sin and Satan unto God. There may be a profession where there is no change; but there never can be true faith without a new creation. 2 Cor. v. 17.

CHRIST OUR TEACHER.

And learn of me.—Matt. xi. 29.

GREAT is that darkness and error which have overspread the minds of men, and by which they are led into false and destructive paths; but where shall we find an instructor to teach us, upon whose instructions we can safely depend? Of whom shall we learn wherein our duty and happiness lie? How we may attain the acceptance and favour of God, and how we may come to the enjoyment of eternal glory? In order thereunto we have only to attend to what our blessed Redeemer here says: we are to "learn of him."

In speaking from this passage, I shall consider,

I. What these great lessons are that we are to learn of Christ.

1. The true knowledge of God. Thus he himself tells us. Matt. xi. 27. John i. 18. See also his prayer to the Father. John xvii. 6.

Much has been taught of God by the light of nature, by tradition, and by the prophets, both of his nature, will, and providence; but this last revelation of him by Christ, has discovered him to us in greater glory than ever before.

2. The knowledge of ourselves. In the light of his gospel we may see ourselves such as we truly are, and not as human pride would paint us. Here we may learn our first fall, and apostacy from God, the misery that sin has brought upon us, that we are full of darkness, error, folly, aversion to good, proneness to evil; how far from God, and liable to wrath. What we are in a state of grace; how changed, justified, sanctified, and adopted into the family of God.

3. Man's recovery and redemption through Christ himself, as he has accomplished the work, so he makes it known to us; as also what he suffered on our account. That he answers to the description of the prophet. Isa. liii. 3. That his love was the moving cause. John x. 18. Gal. ii. 20. That thereby we are to be reconciled to God; to have pardon, peace, and eternal life. John iii. 14, 15. Matt. xx. 28. Eph. i. 7.

4. Those shining graces which are the ornaments of the Christian life. How to behave under all providences; in all duties and relations; how to walk with God, and lead a heavenly life on earth. We are to learn from his precept and example to exercise the Christian grace of love, of humility, of patience. In a word, temperance, moderation, and self-denial, in regard to ourselves; truth, righteousness, and goodness, in regard to others; obedience, thankfulness, and piety towards God.

5. Those comforts that are the support of the Christian life. Whether we are under troubles of a spiritual or temporal nature, we should have recourse to Christ for suitable comforts; none can comfort like him. Of him we may learn how to draw comfort from the promises, the Spirit; all that he has done or suffered for us. Isa. xii. 3.

6. What the future blessed state is, we are expecting and waiting for. He that came from that glory, can best reveal, and make it known: and this he has done as the apostle says, 2 Tim. i. 10. He has given us a map and a draught of the heavenly land. He has taught us that it is a world of complete and consummate holiness; of consummate happiness, where the soul will have joy from within itself, from every object around it, but especially from the eternal vision and enjoyment of God. And to complete its felicity it shall be reunited to its former dear companion, the body, and shall be glorified in it, and with it for ever. Phil. iii. 21.

II. Why we should learn them of Christ, or some considerations to recommend them to our esteem.

1. The excellency of the teacher, Christ himself. It is not one of his prophets or ministers, but himself.

Here we may perceive the authority by which he teaches. He is our Lord and King, as well as instructor. He was commissioned and sent by his Father, and proved his divine commission by the most astonishing miracles, and a voice from heaven declared that it was him that we were to hear. Matt. xvii. 5.

His wisdom, by which he was qualified for such a work. "In him were all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Col. ii. 3. He is said to abound in wisdom. Eph. i. 8. He is called the wisdom of God.

Peter said to him, "thou knowest all things." John xxi. 17. And herein he infinitely excelled Solomon. Matt. xii. 42.

His condescending love and goodness. He comes among us in our nature, and rather beseeches than commands; when he recommends any thing to us, he graciously offers strength to perform it, and a reward when it is performed. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Rev. ii. 10.

His holiness. When wicked men recommend that which is good, they taint it with their polluted hands, and their bad example contradicts and enervates their best instructions; but here is a teacher most holy, and whose pure doctrines are the bright image of himself.

2. The excellency of the doctrines he teaches. "Never man spake like this man," was the confession of even his enemies.

His doctrines were sublime. He unveiled things hidden to the most excellent and penetrating wisdom of man, what was purposed before time, and what shall be transacted when time shall be no more. Col. i. 26.

They were true and certain, not mere conjectures, like many of the opinions of men; but unalterable and eternal truth.

They were important, not trifles merely to amuse, but treat upon salvation, and the way to attain it; how to prevent the loss of the soul; how to flee from the wrath to come; how to obtain God's favour; to overcome death, and secure eternal glory.

They are unspeakably comfortable. Those who believe them, and feel their happy influence, may live comfortably and die comfortably. 1 Thess. iv. 14—18.

3. The excellency of those persons who have learned of Christ. As there never was such an instructor, so there never were such persons as those who have been enlightened by his heavenly instructions. The meanest in Christ's school has far surpassed the highest in the school of nature. The world was not worthy of them. Heb. xi. 38. What excellent men were the apostles, primitive Christians, and martyrs of Christ! They were blessings to the world, ornaments to the places where they lived, beloved of God, and sometimes admired even by their worst enemies. 1 Thess. ii. 10. 3 John 12. Apply the subject,

1. To those who are yet in darkness and ignorance. There are too many of this description not only where the gospel does not shine, but even where it shines in all its glory. So it was in former times: Christ complains of this. John xiv. 9. Also the apostle, Heb. v. 11. Let not such any longer choose darkness rather than light, but wait upon the Lord in his ordinances, that they may learn the lessons of his grace.

2. To those who seek knowledge some other way, and will not subject themselves to learn of Christ. There are many such; they are for reading in the book of nature, and laying aside the book of grace. Or they are for taking their religion more from man than from Christ. Let such look to Christ only as their instructor, rest in, and be satisfied with his teachings, bear his name, follow him, and he will conduct them to glory.

3. To those who have learned of him. Let such be thankful for the light. What darkness and misery have you been delivered from! Put your knowledge into practice; "follow on to know the Lord," and grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen!

GOD'S DIFFERENT REGARDS TO SAINTS AND SINNERS.

For the eyes of the Lord, &c.—1 Pet. iii. 12.

THESE words contain great encouragement to good men, and as great discouragement to the wicked: for, as nothing, on the one hand, can be more desirable than to have the favour of the Almighty; so nothing, on the other, is so uncomfortable, and to be dreaded, as to have God for an enemy. Who they are, that are in the one and in the other of these cases, the words of the text plainly inform us.

In speaking from them, I shall,

I. Take notice of the two sorts of persons here spoken of; the righteous, and those who do evil.

1. The righteous. The term is applied in scripture to pious and good men.

The word is not to be taken in the strict sense, as signifying entire freedom from all sinful defects; but it signifies a person who takes pleasure in righteousness or holiness, who is a true servant of God. They have a true and unfeigned love to all God's commandments, and will not allow themselves in any thing which they know to be contrary to the will of God.

There are not any who are righteous in such a sense as to be justified or cleared by the law, without the favour or grace of the gospel; Rom. iii. 20; but there always have been some spoken of in the scriptures as being righteous, who are God's people, his friends, the children of God, the objects of his favour, the heirs of glory. Prov. xii. 26.

They are called new creatures, passed from death to life, created anew in Christ. They have not already attained, neither are they already perfect; but they follow after spiritual perfection. Phil. iii. 12, 13.

2. Those that do evil. Good men sometimes may do evil, through ignorance, mistake, or the power of temptation; but this is not the bent and disposition of their minds: when sensible of it, they repent and are sorry for it.

The persons here spoken of are of a different spirit: they are evil-doers in the strict sense of the word. Iniquity is their practice and delight; they have pleasure in unrighteousness, serving divers lusts and pleasures: it is their choice, their element to do so.

If they abstain from some vices, it is not because they are hateful to God, but because their inclinations and affections are engaged to some other more beloved vice.

They are devoid of all due regard to the Divine authority, and indulge themselves in tempers, passions, and actions, which appear both by reason and revelation to be contrary both to his nature and his will.

II. How the Lord stands affected both to the one and to the other.

His eyes are over the righteous; which implies,

1. His knowledge of them, their condition and circumstances, whatever they are: he is himself present every where, and can neither be deceived nor mistaken. Ps. cxxxix. 2, 3.

2. It may signify his affection to them. The eye of human creatures

is apt to be very much where the heart is. God's eye is over the righteous, which intimates his love to them. Ps. cxlvi. 8 ; xi. 7.

3. It signifies his providential care of them. He not only knows their affairs, but acts for their benefit and advantage ; to guide, guard, and deliver them, when the circumstances of the case, and their real interest, require it. His ears also are open to their prayer. This implies :

1. That prayer is the common practice of the righteous. They are found praying with all prayer, with every kind of prayer. Eph. vi. 18. The scriptures give us numerous examples : Isaac, Gen. xxiv. 63 ; Moses, Num. xi. 2 ; Samuel, 1 Sam. vii. 5. In like manner Job, Ezra, Hezekiah, Daniel, and especially David ; Ps. v. 2, 3 ; and, under the New Testament, it was the practice of Christ and his apostles.

2. That this their practice is pleasing to God. He does not shut his ears against their prayers, but is ready and willing to hear all their humble and pious requests. Prov. xv. 8, and ver. 29. Ps. lxvi. 18, 19.

3. That it may hence be concluded, that it is a wise and reasonable practice, as it hitherto has been the practice of all good men, and pleasing to God himself. Cant. ii. 14. He loves to hear their voice.

His face is against him that doeth evil. This signifies in general, that he is displeased with such persons. Ps. vii. 11. This implies :

1. That he knows and observes them and their actions ; therefore, his face is against them, because he sees and knows them to be evil-doers. There is not a dark purpose in their heart, much less a wicked action in their lives, but he knows it. Isa. xxix. 15, 16.

2. That their conduct is highly offensive to him. It is only the workers of iniquity that his soul hates, or regards with anger and indignation. Prov. viii. 13.

3. That he will certainly treat them as enemies, if they do not repent and reform. He will, in this case, utterly reject them, cast them away from his presence, and punish them with everlasting destruction. Prov. xxviii. 9. I shall conclude with some reflections upon the whole. And,

1. We may see that happiness is the certain consequence of holiness, and misery as certainly the fruit of sin. Where God is a friend, happiness is insured ; and he is always a friend to holiness. Where God is an enemy, misery is unavoidable ; and he is always an enemy to those whose hearts are set in them to do evil. Ps. xxxvii. 9.

2. We may hence take occasion to reflect on the folly of sin, and the wisdom of being religious. This will secure our truest interest, the favour and friendship of the great God ; and this we cannot have without being truly religious. All the boasted wisdom of the world, without it, is vanity. Job xxviii. 28.

3. This shows us that good men have a great deal of reason to hope in the most dangerous and threatening external circumstances ; and that bad men have much to fear, even in the most prosperous circumstances. Nebuchadnezzar, in the height of his pride, was deprived of his reason, and made an object of contempt. Daniel was preserved in the lion's den, and happily delivered.

4. Consider seriously what is said in the words of our text, and let it influence your choice and conduct. "Cease to do evil, learn to do well." Devote yourselves to the service of God. "Walk in newness of life ;" so shall your labour not be in vain in the Lord.

HEAVEN NOT THE INHERITANCE OF ALL MEN.

Know ye not, that the unrighteous, &c.—1 Cor. vi. 9.

THAT there is a future state of happiness designed for the righteous, will not admit of a doubt; and that all men shall not partake of that blessedness, is equally plain: yea, it is to be feared there are thousands who expect to enjoy it, who will everlastingly fall short of it, deceiving themselves. “Know ye not,” &c.

I. Consider the character of the unrighteous.

1. They are such as, having the form of godliness, are destitute of its power; devoid of those graces which constitute the new creature; and who, although they appear to serve God, yet serve him not, enjoying no spiritual delight in his service.

2. They are under the power of evil habits; not yet washed from their old sins; are under the dominion of sense, minding earthly things; these are their God. Their hope and fear, joy and sorrow, aversion and delight, are excited chiefly by worldly considerations: their affections are set on earth.

3. As is their spirit and temper, so is the tenor of their life and conduct. It is no rule of life with them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to pay a sacred regard to the duties of piety, mercy, and faith. They do not submit to the law of God; they cast off his fear, and walk in the sight of their own eyes.

I do not mean that every unregenerate sinner is openly profane, according to the context; for there are others who, though more disguised, are also the unrighteous spoken of in the text. Not only they who commit such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, but such as take pleasure in them that do them.

4. In a word, inasmuch as only those who have believed on Jesus Christ with the heart unto righteousness are justified, and constituted righteous, their faith being counted to them for righteousness, it follows, that every unbeliever is unrighteous, and in a state of condemnation. John iii. 18.

II. The certainty of their being excluded from the kingdom of God.

1. By the kingdom, here, we are to understand the happiness and glory of a future state, which will principally consist in seeing God, in being like him, and satisfied with that likeness. The unrighteous shall not inherit this kingdom.

2. Inasmuch as they have no right or title to it. It is to Adam's progeny, a forfeited inheritance, and what, by law, they have no claim to. Jesus Christ has purchased it with his blood. Those who have a title to it have received it by grant and promise from Christ; but there is no such grant to the unrighteous in all the character of his kingdom, I mean the gospel. Matt. v. 20. Gal. v. 21. Rev. xxi. 7.

It is “he that believeth hath everlasting life;”—“the pure in heart shall see God.” Matt. v. 8. The obedient soul shall eat of the tree of life. Rev. xxii. 14.

3. They have no disposition and fitness for that kingdom. The happiness of any living thing depends upon a suitableness or proportion between the faculty and object to be enjoyed : where there is no suitableness, there can be no satisfaction. Many seem to have a desire to go to heaven, and at the same time a settled dislike to holiness, their only meetness for it. Know ye not that this kingdom consists of righteousness? How then can the unrighteous inherit the same? Deluded soul! God has established it, and it will stand, that without "holiness no man shall see God;" or, as it is in the text, "The unrighteous," &c. I go on,

III. To inquire into the import of the apostle's manner of speaking upon this subject. "Know ye not," says he, "that the unrighteous," &c. To which he adds, "Be not deceived;" intimating,

1. That the truth delivered in this passage is as plain as it is important. "Know ye not," says the apostle. God declares it in his word. The light of nature teaches it; for if there is a difference between vice and virtue, there must be a difference also between the condition of good and bad men in a future state. Many profess to believe that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God; and make a trade of unrighteousness and sin. This is a very strange, but a melancholy truth, which leads me to observe,

2. That plain and acknowledged as the apostle's doctrine is, people are apt to impose upon themselves in the application of it. The Corinthians did not doubt this truth, and yet he immediately adds, "Be not deceived." Would to God there were less ground for this caution! We have heard of the hope of the hypocrite, and of Balaam's wish. How many go down to the pit with a lie in their right hand! But how is this?

It may be owing to our thinking that we are righteous, when we are not. Luke xviii. 11, 12. The pharisee thought himself a hopeful candidate for heaven.

Is there no unrighteousness in thy indifference to the gospel? in thy unbelief and impenitence for sin? in thy distrust of the promises of God? in thy secret murmurs at the conduct of providence? &c. &c. Be not deceived.

3. There are others who pretend to rely upon the righteousness of Christ to introduce them to the kingdom of God; though conscious of their unrighteous character, and continuing filthy still. Deadly deceit! Christ died for sin, but his obedience to death does not supersede the necessity of our being born again, repenting and believing the gospel. Was he then so holy, as to take away our obligation to be holy likewise? Or was his love to God so ardent to excuse us, though we are haters of him? Gal. vi. 7.

What monstrous absurdities are these, and gross abuse of gospel grace, thus to set Christ at variance with himself! thus to divorce his death from the great end of it! How very different the language of scripture! Tit. ii. 14. Eph. v. 25—27.

I shall conclude by a few reflections upon what has been said.

1. We see the necessity of inculcating, with great plainness of speech, the capital doctrines of religion. Although these are of the last importance, men can and will impose upon themselves: they acknowledge

a future state, and the necessity of a preparation for it; but how wretchedly is this mistaken, and how regardless are they about it!

2. Let us beware of the fond and foolish hope of inheriting the kingdom of God, while we have no meetness for it. Brethren, be not deceived: study to know your real character. Sure I am, to be wholly in the dark about this, is very comfortless; and awfully dangerous. If our title to an earthly fortune were called in question, how strictly would we inquire into our rights! and can we find no leisure to examine how our hope of heaven is founded?

3. Let the unrighteous, misled by their deceived hearts, be prevailed upon to look forward to the issue of their present security, and to think of their dreadful disappointment at death and judgment, when they shall be cast down from the pinnacle of their imaginary hope, into the depth of endless despair. O how unfathomable the fall, and irrecoverable! Be persuaded to prevent this in the day of your merciful visitation. A blacker catalogue of vile sinners, than that after the text, is scarcely to be found; but they were washed, &c. And you may obtain the same mercy, the same happy change. His name and Spirit have still the same energy to effect it. In thy distress let thy cry come up before him, that thou mayest find mercy to pardon, grace to renew and to help in time of need.

IRRELIGION AND VICE DANGEROUS AND DESTRUCTIVE.

For the wrath of God, &c.—Rom. i. 18.

In the preceding context the apostle declares himself not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; but glories in it as the most effectual means to reform and save a profligate world. Not only as it reveals the riches of mercy in the justification of the sinner through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but also as it displays Divine justice in all its terrors against sin. "For the wrath," &c. I shall consider,

I. What we are to understand by the wrath of God, and its being revealed from heaven: and,

1. To prevent mistakes we must observe, that when anger, wrath, vengeance, and the like, are ascribed to God, this is speaking of him after the manner of men. Fury is not in him. Nor can he be affected with that disorder, tumult, and storm, which unquiet passions raise in us. His wrath, then, is his deliberate, determined will to punish; to inflict what is grievous to body or spirit, or to both.

2. And this wrath is said to be revealed from heaven, to signify his supreme authority and right. The heavens, as is most just, do bear rule. This is as true with respect to the moral, as the material world. It belongs to the King above to give laws to mankind, and to maintain their dignity against bold offenders. It is now revealed, or sufficiently made known, that none may plead, or pretend ignorance: which leads me,

II. To point out the various ways in which God has revealed his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

1. He hath done this in some degree by reason and the light of nature. The great lines of duty, and the eternal difference between good and evil, are inscribed deeply upon the human mind, and legible still even amidst its present darkness. There is a power in the soul to call self to an account for its own actings, to sting with remorse when it does wrong, and presage heavier wrath to come.

2. His wrath has been revealed to the senses of men as matter of experience and certain fact: all history abounds with examples to this purpose; but the holy scriptures furnish the most authentic and awful.

What tremendous havoc did it make in heaven, when the fallen angels were driven from their shining seats!

What mournful work did it make in the earthly paradise, when God's younger and favourite creature became a rebel, and was driven out of it!

How dreadfully was it displayed in the deluge, when only eight souls of the human race were saved!

In what flaming colours did it break forth upon the devoted cities of the plain, who are spoken of as an example of suffering the vengeance of eternal fire! Others might be mentioned, but let these suffice.

3. It is revealed in his holy word. There he has declared in the plainest language his determined purpose to punish the guilty: There it is described in language the most awful and tremendous. "Blackness of darkness; the worm that dies not; a lake of fire and brimstone; fire that shall never be quenched."

It remains to inquire,

III. Into the object and cause of this wrath; or against what it is revealed. It is revealed,

1. Against the ungodliness of men. The irreligious and profane; who, although they believe in the being of a God, entertain unworthy thoughts of him; do not reverence, love, and obey him; who slight the counsels of his wisdom, the authority of his law, and the promises of mercy in his beloved Son. And whose desires, delight, and expectations are more fixed upon the world, than upon him who made them. This is ungodliness, and most justly kindles the wrath of Heaven; for it is worshipping the creature more than the Creator.

2. Against the unrighteousness of men. As the former expressed the violations of the first table of the law, so this comprehends the sins against the second. The unrighteous pay no regard to the royal law of love; are unfeeling and callous to the miseries of their fellow-creatures: they pay little regard to the immutable laws of justice; and will not scruple to hurt their neighbour in his person, property, or good name.

Such are unrighteous to themselves, to the better part of themselves. The soul is neglected, wronged, and left to starve, to pine away in sin, and perish eternally. 1 Cor. vi. 9.

3. His wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Every particular instance and species of sin, included in these general characters, is the object of Divine abhorrence, and that without exception. It is true, all are not equally guilty, some more and some less; and hence we read of greater damnation, and of much sorer punishment; but yet the wages of sin, of all sin, is death. Rom. vi. 23.

I shall now close the subject by a few inferences from what has been said. And,

1. What an excellent institution is the gospel of Christ ! How God-like and truly divine is the purpose and fruit of it ! “It is the power of God unto salvation,” &c. Rom. i. 16. To people of every country, rank, denomination, and sex. What the powers of reason and philosophy could not do, the gospel has gloriously accomplished.

2. How great must be the depravity of human nature, and the deceitfulness of sin, when means so excellent are so fruitless to many ! Are they not as an adamant, whom the tender mercies of God in his Son will not melt ? Are they not fast asleep whom the thunders of Sinai will not awake ? They will not be persuaded, that because of these things the wrath of God will come upon them. Eph. v. 6.

3. Does conscience attest that such are some of you ? That you are chargeable in the sight of God with the character and practices of the ungodly and unrighteous ? Admit the conviction : suffer the word of exhortation : “Let the wicked,” &c. Isa. lv. 7. Yes, such have been pardoned and washed too ; and if you apply, by faith, to the fountain of redeeming blood, you also shall be made whiter than the snow.

4. From the discoveries which God gives of his wrath in this world, look forward to the more abundant and awful displays of it in the next. Let the disobedient take warning and fly from the wrath to come. In this world, it is but a little wrath, and for a moment ; but the day of the Lamb’s wrath, which draws nigh, will be endless and great, beyond conception great. Then there will be no friend to pity, no hiding-place from the storm, no God to go to. O hear this, ye that live in sin, and are at ease ! It is a friend that calls. He is a friend to himself who will listen and speedily comply. “Kiss the Son,” &c. Ps. ii. 12.

DEATH THE WAGES OF SIN, ETERNAL LIFE THE GIFT OF GOD.

For the wages of sin is death, &c.—Rom. vi. 23.

ALL the troubles and miseries of the present life can be traced to that awful source, sin : it is the parent of sorrow and death. We lament our misery ; but this is only looking at the effect, and losing sight of the cause.

On the other hand, the life eternal is the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

The servants of sin are employed in a fruitless, shameful and destructive work ; but the servants of God have their fruit unto holiness, and their end everlasting life. In a word, the apostle here informs us, “that the wages of sin is death,” &c,

Consider,

I. That death is the wages of sin, and how it will appear to be so. The death here spoken of is,

1. Death temporal, which consists in the separation of soul from the body. Gen. iii. 19.

2. Death spiritual, which all are in till grace quickens them. Eph. ii. 1. They are dead to God, to all good desire, and gracious affection to him.

3. Death eternal, which is the greatest loss, and the extreme of misery, the complete and irrecoverable ruin of man. It is called the second death. Rev. xxi. 8.

And that death is the wages of sin, will appear when we consider,

1. That the word of God says so. Adam was threatened with it, in case of disobedience. Gen. ii. 17. Also the prophet declares, "When I say unto the wicked," &c. Ezek. iii. 18. And the apostle, Rom. v. 12; viii. 13.

2. There was no such thing as death in the world, till sin brought it in: no discomposure of the human frame, no sickness, no disease, no ravenous cruel nature in the beasts, no poisonous serpents armed against us, no thorns or thistles, or any thing that could harm us. Sin armed man against man, Cain against Abel, nation against nation. Ja. iv. 1.

There was no spiritual death before sin. Man enjoyed the heavenly and divine life in all its vigour.

There was no apprehension of eternal death: sin opened the mouth of the bottomless pit, and kindled the flames there.

3. That we can assign no other cause for it. Why is it that we are all so naturally dead to spiritual and eternal things? Why exposed to such dreadful danger as eternal death? Why is the body of man, formed for immortality, subject to disease and death? Sin, sin is the only cause.

4. That in many cases death has been the immediate consequence of sin. Worldly sorrow worketh death. 2 Cor. vii. 10. For it the wicked were cut off. Ps. xxxvii. 34. See Ananias, &c. Acts v. 1—11.

II. That eternal life is the gift of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. The life here spoken of is,

1. A life that shall never be forfeited, as man's life in paradise was.

2. It will not be subject to any distemper, pain, decay, or death. Rev. xxi. 4.

3. It shall be enjoyed in heaven, in the presence of God, in the society of glorified saints and angels, in the fruition of the sublimest intellectual and spiritual pleasures; the life of holiness and happiness shall be completed, divine grace and redeeming love eternally glorified in us. In a word, we shall desire nothing but what we shall possess, and crave nothing but what we shall enjoy. The felicities of the present life are but the shadow of death when compared to it. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

And the faithful servants of the Lord shall certainly enjoy this eternal life. For,

1. God has assured them of it; as in the text, so in many other places. Rom. ii. 7. Tit. iii. 7. He has promised it to them. Tit. i. 2. Heb. iv. 1.

2. They rejoice in hope of it. Rom. v. 2.

3. Their adoption is a pledge and assurance of it. They are joint heirs with Christ. Rom. viii. 17.

4. And they have the first fruits of it already in their hearts. Rom. viii. 23. This eternal life is said to be the gift of God.

1. The scriptures always speak of it as such. 1 John v. 11. 2 Thess. ii. 16. And it is thus spoken of to humble us, and fill us with high and adoring thoughts of the Divine bounty and goodness.

2. The things that lead to eternal life, and which make us meet for it, are the gift of God. It is given us to know the mysteries of the

kingdom. Matt. xiii. 11. Justified freely by his grace. Rom. iii. 24. Saved by faith, which is his gift. Eph. ii. 8. Also the foretastes of it. Rom. xv. 13.

3. There is no other way by which we can receive it. If not by grace and by gift, then no way at all; for we have no merit of our own to deserve it.

This eternal life is received through Jesus Christ, inasmuch

1. As he has purchased eternal life; for as his humiliations, his reproaches, buffetings, dying groans and agonies, were the price he paid for it, it is the purchased possession. Eph. i. 14. He obtained eternal redemption for us. Heb. ix. 12. He has bought us with a price. 1 Pet. i. 18.

2. He revealed it to us, brought life and immortality to light. 2 Tim. i. 10. He could best reveal heaven who came from thence. He satisfied his disciples as to the reality of it; for he permitted them to see Moses and Elijah conversing with him on the mount, who were then in possession of it. He permitted many of them to see his ascension to it; and Stephen and Paul saw him in it.

3. He prepares us for it. He justifies, pardons, sanctifies, and so makes us meet to enter into it. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

4. He is gone before us to prepare the comforts and glories of it for us. As our forerunner he has entered for us. Heb. vi. 20. John xiv.

2. He is providing for us a full and complete happiness above. He is spreading forth that entertainment for us, that shall transport our souls with eternal raptures of joy and praise.

5. He will confer it on us, and receive us into it; his kind hand shall put that crown upon us: his bands of angels shall convey us to it: his voice shall welcome us to the enjoyment of it. John xiv. 3. 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17. Improvement:

1. Since death is the wages of sin, beware of sin, and shun all temptation to it. "Stand in awe, and sin not." Ps. iv. 4. Though the work of sin may please you, yet certainly the wages cannot. The wages is death, whatever it may falsely promise you. Who would work for such a reward? Rather repent, put off sin, mortify it, &c.

2. Let us determine for eternal life. What are all other objects when compared to this? Seek it first, and all others may be added to you. If you secure eternal life, then you are made happy for ever.

3. Receive it as a gift of God. If you think you deserve it, you shall never have it.

4. Expect it through Jesus Christ. Give your Redeemer his own proper glory herein, as does the apostle, Eph. i. 6, 7. 1 Cor. i. 4. Rom. v. 1, 2. And there is no other name by which we can be saved. Acts iv. 12.

THE

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

Say ye to the righteous, &c.—Isa. iii. 10, 11.

THE whole of mankind are divided into two great classes; I mean the children of God, and the children of Satan, to whom the Lord by his

Spirit in his word, speaks in very different language. To the righteous he speaks in the language of consolatory peace; but to the wicked he declares there is no peace. The text contains God's command to the prophet Isaiah, concerning the particular message he was to deliver to each. "Say ye to the righteous," &c. Consider,

I. Who are the righteous?

1. Not the self-righteous, who have a high opinion of themselves: who trust in themselves and in their own doings for pardon and acceptance with God, who justify themselves before God, and thank God that they are not as other men. Luke xviii. 9—14.

2. They are such as are pardoned and justified through faith in Christ Jesus. Rom. v. 1. Having repented of their sins, they have believed with the heart unto righteousness. Rom. x. 10. And their faith is counted to them for righteousness. Rom. iv. 3. Their faith apprehending Christ's righteousness, or obedience to death for them, God places it to their account, and hence they are pardoned and justified before God. Rom. iii. 24, 25.

3. They are changed in heart and life by the Spirit of God; they have a clean heart and pure hands; they abhor sin, and love holiness; they are new creatures in Christ. 2 Cor. v. 17. Hence they resemble God in his moral perfections, in righteousness, and true holiness.

II. What is here said of the righteous? "It shall be well with them."

1. It shall be well with them in this life. To some this may appear a perfect paradox, especially when they read that the afflictions of the righteous are many; Ps. xxxiv. 19; and that it is through much tribulation they are to enter heaven. Acts xiv. 22. But if they are afflicted in their persons, God supports them, sanctifies their afflictions, and delivers them. If they are in poverty, they enjoy that happiness which the greatest abundance can never confer. If they are tempted, God succours and delivers them. If they suffer from the agents of Satan, though they feel as men, they hope and rejoice as saints. Matt. v. 12.

2. It shall be well with them in death. The sting is gone, and they obtain the victory. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. Death is one of their blessings. It separates the body from the soul only for a time. It opens a passage to unspeakable happiness; to the dwelling of God, to God himself, to Jesus Christ, to the society of angels, to the perfect spirits of the just; there they shall be free from sorrow, disease, pain, temptation, and enjoy an eternal rest.

3. It shall be well with the righteous at the resurrection, and at the great and solemn day of judgment. This will be a day of inconceivable terror and solemnity. It is thus described. Ps. l. 3. Dan. vii. 9, 10. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. 2 Pet. iii. 10. Rev. xx. 11. The righteous shall behold all this undismayed. The thunders of that day shall not terrify them. The appearance of the Judge, the flames which surround them, the crash of worlds, the universal wreck of nature, shall not touch them; with exulting joy shall they hail the Saviour, meet him in the air, and be for ever with him.

4. It shall be well with them in heaven through all eternity. What they now feel is but an earnest of what is to come. They shall be like God, for they shall see him as he is; with their eyes shall they behold

the body of Christ, in which he suffered, but now glorified, and falling down, shall say, "thou wast slain." Rev. v. 9.

They shall be absolutely free from every evil. Satan shall never tempt them, nor sin ever trouble them.

Their joy, without any mixture of sorrow, shall shine, from face to face; and love, absolutely free from hatred, deceit or envy, shall flow from heart to heart.

In short, they shall constantly travel on from happiness to happiness, and from glory to glory, but shall never arrive at any period.

II. Who are the wicked?

1. All those are wicked who are in their natural estate. Ps. lv. 3. Children soon discover their evil dispositions, by their aversion to good, and their inclination to evil. Prov. xxii. 15.

But when persons arrive at mature years, it is then that they show the exceeding sinfulness of their nature; then, with what pleasure do they join in sins! what fond attachment to the world and its vain amusements! what reluctance do they discover to join in religious services! what uneasiness while engaged in them! what an awful indifference to the prosperity of religion in this world, and to their own personal eternal concerns! All of which bespeak the wickedness of the human heart. Jer. xvii. 9.

2. Those are wicked who live in the habitual influence of sin in their hearts: when sinful thoughts reign and prevail in the heart, that heart is a wicked heart.

When worldly, earthly, and selfish thoughts have the ascendancy in the soul, that soul must be carnal, and under the dominion of sin. Matt. vi. 25.

When persons are more in earnest to obtain the riches of earth, than the unsearchable riches of Christ, and eternal glory, they are the wicked, whatever their religious character and profession among men may be.

3. Those who live under the habitual influence of sinful words and actions. When the heart is impure, the conversation will be impure also. Matt. xii. 24. The discourse of the wicked is not spiritual but carnal.

They can wantonly and wickedly speak of God, and limit the Holy One of Israel.

They wickedly arraign his nature, government, and providence, and deny the reality and consistence of his word.

They speak of religion in the language of contempt, and declare it to be untrue, of no value or importance.

Their language is very often impure, showing the prevailing passions and dispositions within.

Many of the wicked profane the holy name of God, and can hardly utter a sentence without it. What horrid oaths and imprecations proceed from their lips! This is the case from one end of the nation to the other; with parents, children, masters, servants; old, young, learned and unlearned, rich and poor, are all guilty of it. Jer. xxiii. 10.

What is the guilt of a thief or a robber, who takes another's property, when compared with the guilt of a profane swearer? such a one robs God of his glory, and insults him to his face; and if the one is hanged

for his dishonesty, what may the other expect, when the Almighty God shall come as his judge, surrounded with flames of fire?

Those also are wicked who are living under the habitual influence of sinful actions. A good man may occasionally be overcome with evil; but he will mourn before God on the account of it; but the wicked live under the daily and regular habit of sin.

4. Those are wicked who live in the neglect of religious duties: such as private prayer, family devotion: who profane the holy sabbath by deserting the house of God, turning that day into a day of riot, paying or settling their accounts, forming plans for the business of the week, giving and receiving worldly orders, buying and selling.

IV. What is here said of them? "It shall be ill with the wicked."

1. It shall be ill with them in this life. They are destitute of real happiness; they could not be happy if they possessed the whole world.

When sin reigns in the heart, that heart cannot enjoy real peace. Isa. lvii. 21.

While they are wicked, they are under the curse of the Lord. Deut. xxviii. 15—20.

The Lord's curse is in the house of the wicked. Prov. iii. 33.

And as many as are under the law are under the curse. Gal. iii. 10.

2. It shall be ill with the wicked in death. To them he is the king of terrors. He comes armed with his sting, to pierce them through with many sorrows. They now find that Satan, the world, and their own hearts have deceived them; that the ways of sin are the ways of death. They are now tortured with the accusations of a guilty conscience, and the fearful forebodings of eternal vengeance.

3. It shall be ill with the wicked at the resurrection and day of judgment. Their bodies shall be raised to everlasting condemnation. John v. 29. Great shall be their terror to behold the world in flames, the grandeur of the Judge, the host of angels, the all-merciful Saviour of sinners, angels and saints, heaven and earth, forsaking them, and hell taking hold upon them.

4. It shall be ill with the wicked through eternity. At death their happiness shall end, and their misery begin; they shall be delivered over to wicked spirits, their tormentors; to outer darkness. Matt. viii. 12. To the lake of fire, Rev. xx. 14, where there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

Application:

1. Ye have now heard the character and condition of the righteous and wicked described: has it led you to think of your sins, and pray for deliverance?

2. Let us rejoice that Christ is able to save the wicked from their wickedness, and from all the alarming consequences of sin: he came into this world to save even the chief of sinners; humbled himself, suffered and died for that very purpose.

3. Ye who are hard-hearted and inconsiderate sinners, consider your present awful situation; and what is now awaiting you. Now is the accepted time; the door is open: then fly to Christ, while yet there is hope.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF PRIDE.

Those that walk in pride, &c.—Dan. iv. 37.

SUCH was the language of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, at the end of seven years' unexampled degradation, when he had recovered his reason, and was made sensible of his dependence upon God.

Pride was the occasion of this singular and humiliating abasement; and the means of instruction and correction appointed by Divine Providence proved effectual.

Pride is an unjust estimate which a person forms of himself, on account of some real or imaginary excellence, attended with an anxious desire that others should so think and speak of us, as to fan this unhalloved flame.

With a view to the prevention and cure of so great an evil, I shall,
I. Show the sinfulness and danger of pride.

1. Pride is, as far as we know, the first sin that ever was committed. It seems to have been the leading transgression in the defection of fallen angels. The apostle, when guarding the Christian ministry against the innovation of improper candidates, says, "not a novice," &c. 1 Tim. iii. 6. A plain intimation that the revolt of Satan originated in pride; and by affecting others with the same swelling vanity, this deceiver lays a plot for their downfall.

2. Pride renders persons, in a special manner, hateful and abominable in the sight of God. Prov. viii. 13. Sin being opposed to the Divine will, cannot but be infinitely odious. Pride is placed in the front of those seven things which God hates. Prov. xvi. 5. By other offences persons turn God away from them; but by pride they turn him against them. James iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 5.

3. Pride is productive of other sins. It is a fountain sending forth impure streams. Many of those crimes which abound in the world, and by which it is rendered so miserable, are the genuine offspring of pride. Prov. xiii. 10, 16, 18.

Hence spring covetousness, Hab. ii. 5; persecution, Ps. x. 2; strifes and quarrels, Prov. xiii. 10. Absalom's pride led him to rebellion; Athaliah's pride prompted her to slay the royal seed; Haman's pride excited him to meditate the death of all the Jews; Herod's pride stimulated him to attempt to take away the life of Christ; and the pharisees, influenced by it and other malignant passions, were very active in accomplishing his death.

4. Pride is a destructive sin. It is a presage of the ruin of those in whom it reigns. It goes before destruction. Prov. xvi. 18. It produces shame. Prov. xi. 2. It was one of the sins of Sodom, and they were dreadfully punished for it. Gen. xix. 24, 25. Haughty Pharaoh and his hosts, who were drowned in the Red Sea. Ex. xiv. 27, 28. Haman's pride brought him to the gallows. Esther vii. 10. Nebuchadnezzar's pride brought him to a level with the beasts of the field. Dan. iv. 32, 33. Herod's pride brought a curse upon him. Acts xii. 23. God says that such shall be abased. Luke xiv. 11. And that a man's pride shall bring him low. Prov. xxix. 23.

II. Propose some remedies against it.

1. Endeavour to acquire the knowledge of your own meanness and sinfulness, and of the holiness and majesty of God; for by comparing yourselves with him, you will sink into nothing in your own esteem.

With a view to obtain this knowledge, read the holy scriptures; attend the ministry of the gospel; apply to the throne of grace; seek the aid of pious Christians. In proportion as you obtain knowledge, pray that it may be sanctified to you: without the Divine blessing, "knowledge puffeth up;" but with it produces humility. Labour much for this knowledge, as ignorance is the cause of pride. 1 Tim. vi. 4.

2. Be persuaded of the excellency of humility, the grace opposite to pride, and "be clothed with it." 1 Pet. v. 5. It is a grace of superior eminence in Christianity: Christ places it in the front of the beatitudes, Matt. v. 3, and declares the humble Christian to be the most excellent. Matt. xviii. 4. The most invaluable promises are made to such. Isa. lvii. 15. James iv. 6. Matt. xxiii. 12.

3. Consider well the examples of humility set before you in the sacred scriptures. Examples have a powerful influence upon others. In the Bible you have eminent examples of humility. Abraham, Jacob, David, Agur, Paul, and many others; yea, the holy angels fall down before the throne in lowest adoration; but, above all, the example of Jesus Christ. We are to "learn of him," Matt. xi. 29. And to have the same mind. Phil. ii. 5.

4. Understand that all your natural and acquired abilities are the gifts of God. All your mental and corporeal excellences, or whatever else you may possess, are talents intrusted to your care and management. 1 Cor. iv. 7. Attach responsibility to yourself for all you now have in possession: and, so far from glorying in them, you will see the necessity of faithfully examining how you are employing them.

5. Though some of you are young, and in great danger of being proud of yourselves, yet, consider, you cannot live long in this world, and at the hour of death all these outward things you so much admire will leave you. Reflect that your bodies must be laid in the grave, and be food for worms. Secure then an interest in Jesus Christ, that you may have a title to heaven; and when you fail on earth, you shall be received into everlasting habitations of glory and happiness.

6. Let those who have been deeply humbled under a sense of their sinfulness and vileness, and who are "walking humbly with God," aim at higher attainments in that Christian grace. Let them live in the constant exercise of what they have received, and they shall receive yet more abundantly. The Lord gives grace to the humble. 1 Pet. v. 5. And in due time he will exalt them to his everlasting kingdom. 1 Pet. v. 6.

PARDONING MERCY TO OTHERS,

AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE HOPE OF SINNERS.

Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, &c.—1 Tim. i. 16.

THE apostle Paul is continually magnifying the grace and mercy of God, in his conversion; and we are to improve his example, for our encour-

agement and comfort. Why should sinners be unwilling to go to Christ, when the Saviour himself met the apostle, and spoke first to him? Why should they say that they are past mercy, when Paul obtained mercy? Why should they despair, because of the number and greatness of their sins, when Paul, who was a persecutor, a blasphemer, a murderer, obtained mercy? To encourage sinners to look to God for mercy, is the manifest design of the text. "Howbeit, for this cause," &c. In speaking from these words, I shall consider,

I. That when any are converted unto God, it is an obtaining of mercy : and this will appear when we consider,

1. What we have been before conversion. There has been in us the greatest unworthiness to receive so great a favour; we have rather been fit objects of detestation and abhorrence.

Darkness, ignorance, pride, and obstinacy, have dwelt in us.

Multitudes of lusts and sins have taken up their abode in our hearts and lives; they are like a cage of unclean birds. Rev. xviii. 2.

What had Paul to recommend him to mercy? Of all others he was the most unlikely ever to obtain it, and yet he did obtain it.

See the character of those who were washed, &c. 1 Cor. vi. 9—11. Also Eph. ii. 3, 4.

2. The obstacles and hinderances to conversion. Were there no difficulties in the way, the work might soon be accomplished: but,

We have opposers within ourselves; our own heart is too much inclined to be on the wrong side. Jer. xvii. 9.

We have opposers without also. There is Satan with his temptations, to be unconcerned about our souls, to defer it to another time; and yet hope for mercy in such circumstances. Eph. vi. 12.

There is the world with its snares and insinuations, offering to us meaner things than the glorious blessings of the gospel.

It must be a great mercy to get over such entanglements, and fly to Christ for salvation.

3. How many yet remain in an unconverted state!

When we are brought into the King's chamber, and are permitted to sit down at the marriage feast, others remain without. The noble and the great are often left, while the meaner ones obtain mercy. The rich man perished, and poor Lazarus was saved. Luke xvi. 19—31.

How many live in the same country, city, town, village, and even family, where we live, who are yet in darkness and death, while we enjoy both light and life. O what a mercy!

4. The great variety of discoveries of mercy which are made to a converted soul.

The fountain of grace is branched forth into many streams.

There are the outward means of grace, and the sabbath of the Lord.

There is the Lord's blessing upon sabbaths and opportunities, which otherwise would be of no avail.

And there are also the various steps that God takes in our conversion: enlightening our understandings; awakening our consciences; convincing us of sin; making us willing to part with it; to accept the invitations of Christ to turn to the Lord, to put off the old man, and put on the new.

II. That the Lord's long-suffering and patience are wonderfully dis-

played in the conversion of sinners : it is said, that " he might show forth all long-suffering."

Other scriptures speak to the same purpose ; 2 Pet. iii. 9 ; and our Lord's parable is a very suitable instance here. Luke xiii. 6, 7.

Few come at the first call, or at the second ; many a precious opportunity is lost ; many an invitation disregarded ; many a check of conscience stifled ; many provocations to cause the Lord to withdraw, and yet he continues his suit. Rev. iii. 20. It is not presently that this heavenly visitor is let in. Cant. v. 2.

Much time is given for repentance, and hence the long-suffering and patience of God. Many lose the spring time of youth, and yet God spares them to old age. God waited on Israel forty years, and tried them. Ps. xcv. 10. Much time was given to the old world to improve by the exhortations of Noah. 1 Pet. iii. 20. And the Lord gave Jezebel space for repentance. Rev. ii. 21.

Sinners provoke God, and yet he does not cut them off. Manasseh filled the land with idolatry and blood. Paul had a hand in imprisoning and murdering the saints. God says, by the prophet, " I will not," &c. Hos. i. 9.

III. That instances of converting grace are precedents and patterns to encourage others. It is said, " I have obtained mercy, for a pattern," &c.

An act of grace brings in many, that would otherwise be likely to persist in obstinacy and rebellion. If one meets with acceptance and pardon, others will come in. When some that we read of in scripture have tasted of the grace of God, others have been desirous to taste of the same.

Apostacies seldom go alone, and so conversions seldom are of one or two only. After Paul's conversion, many were converted by his means and example : the Lord said of him, " He is a chosen vessel," &c. Acts ix. 15. The grace bestowed on the woman of Samaria brought out many others to Christ. John iv. 28—30. Philip believed first, and then he brought in Nathaniel. When some believed, others believed also. Acts xvii. 34. Apply the subject :

1. Let us often reflect with praise and thanksgiving, what a mercy it is that God has converted our souls to himself ; and say, with Paul, " but I have obtained mercy." I, the most undeserving, the chief of sinners. Often reflect upon the time and place, when and where God converted you. Think upon what you have gained by conversion, and what would have been your loss without.

2. Finding yourselves happy in the grace of God, walk worthy of that merciful God, who has brought you into it.

Kings' children should act like such, and not like those of meaner birth and parentage ; and so should the children of God, who are a chosen generation, &c. 1 Pet. ii. 9. Eph. iv. 1. How do angels rejoice when a soul is converted ! And does not this call for suitable returns from you ?

3. When you find yourselves in that happy state of grace, take comfort in it ; if doubts arise, look back and remember the loving kindness of the Lord.

4. If any of you are not as yet in so happy a state, take encouragement from the consideration of God's great mercy and goodness, in receiving repenting and believing sinners ; and as a farther encouragement, think on those words of the prophet, Isa. lv. 7.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF REFUSING THE CALLS OF MERCY.

Because I have called, &c.—Prov. i. 24—26.

It is an awful thing to disregard the calls of the Almighty; to despise his counsel and reproof: such harden themselves against the terrors of his power, and all the melting persuasions of his love. Alas! alas! it is to be feared there are but too many of this description: hence the necessity of treating upon such subjects as these, to rouse them to a sense of their guilt and folly, and to show them the fearful hazard that they run, the tremendous consequences of their present behaviour.

In speaking from this passage of scripture, I shall show,

I. That God calls on sinners.

1. This is clear from many parts of scripture. See the text. Also Isa. lv. 1, 3, 6, &c. Isa. lxxv. 1, 2. Ezek. xviii. 30, 31.

2. He calls them by the ministry of his word. Isa. lxii. 6. 2 Cor. v. 20.

3. By the voice of their own consciences, which all have felt at different times. Acts ii. 37. Rom. ii. 15.

4. The end to which he calls us in these different ways, is to repent and turn from our sins, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts xx. 21. Mark i. 15. As to the nature and manner of those calls, they are,

1. Kind and gracious: they are full of love, tenderness, and pity, enough to melt a heart of stone. Deut. xxxii. 29. Hos. xi. 8. Matt. xxiii. 37. Luke xix. 41, 42. What moving expostulations are these!

2. They carry the highest reason and persuasion along with them. It is to avoid our own ruin, and secure our own happiness. God is perfectly happy without us; but he calls us to himself, because we cannot be happy without him.

3. They last but for a season. His patience will at last be worn out by our many obstinate refusals. The shining day of grace at last ends in the eternal shades of night. Matt. xxiii. 38. Isa. lxvi. 4. Jer. vii. 13—15. He that now stands knocking at the door of our hearts, may, in a little time, be armed against us with unrelenting fury.

II. That sinners too often refuse to hearken to the calls of God.

Thus it is in the text. God calls, but men refuse, &c. Many hear the gospel calls, but few are obedient to them. The old world would not be reformed by the preaching of Noah. The Israelites stoned the prophets that were sent to them. Jer. vii. 24—26. 2 Chron. xxiv. 21. When the apostles preached the gospel with Divine power, and confirmed what they said by miracles, yet it is said, that some believed, and others believed not. Now, whence can this proceed, that so many are disobedient to the heavenly call?

1. It is partly owing to unbelief. They disbelieve his promises and threatenings, the greatness of his power, and the wonders of his grace; shut their eyes against the evidences of his word, and regard the things future as uncertain.

2. Others slight the word because they are prejudiced against the messenger that brings it, regarding his imperfections and inadvertencies more than the weight of those things which he delivers.

3. Others do it through ignorance : darkness and blindness of mind make them hardened and obstinate. They know not God, their sinful state, their need of Christ, nor the beauty and excellency of spiritual things.

4. Others through pride reject the calls of God. They are full of self-sufficiency ; they do not see themselves poor, blind, naked, weak, and destitute. Rev. iii. 17.

5. Others through love of the world. The business of the world engrosses their time, and the pleasures and gratifications of it entirely engage and captivate their affections. "They mind earthly things."

6. Others through a false peace. Though on the brink of eternal ruin, yet they lull themselves asleep, and think all safe and well ; the evil day they put far from them, and all thought of death and judgment.

III. The evil and danger of refusing to hearken to God's calls, his counsel, and reproof. And,

1. It is the most heinous ingratitude to God. That God who gave us our being, who hath loved us, given his Son for us, offers us pardon, and every spiritual blessing, who is full of mercy and compassion towards us ! How does God accuse such persons, and set their ingratitude before them ! Deut. xxxii. 15—17. Ezek. xx. 6—8.

2. It is a contempt of God's power. The obstinate sinner does, in a manner, deny and dare the power of God : but let such know, that as one hand of God is stretched out to us with the kindest offers of mercy, so the other is armed with such a power as will strike through kings ; nay, and worlds too, in the day of his wrath. Ps. cx. 5, 6.

3. We rob ourselves of the greatest advantages. He calls us to accept of pardon through Christ ; to holiness, that we may reflect his image ; to the joy of his countenance ; the comforts of his Holy Spirit ; to everlasting life and happiness ; to the enjoyment of his heavenly kingdom. 1 Thess. ii. 12. But all this is lost if we reject his calls. O what a loser then is the poor, wilful, obstinate sinner ! He shuts his ear against God now, and God will hereafter shut the gate of heaven against him : then shall he know the greatness of his loss, and bewail it with endless tears and lamentations.

4. By rejecting the calls of God, we run ourselves into the greatest misery and ruin. What threatenings and woe are denounced against the obstinate sinner ! See the text. They will be subject to calamity, fear, desolation, and destruction ; and no help from God, but the contrary. Rom. ii. 4—6. Heb. x. 28, 29. O infatuated sinners ! in what evils do they involve themselves ! God is their enemy ; the curses of the impenitent belong to them ; they are without God, without Christ, without hope. What will they do in death ? What after death ? How appear before God ? How awful their sentence ! How woful their habitation amidst the devouring flames ! "It is a fearful thing," &c. Heb. x. 31.

I now come to apply the subject. And,

1. Let us admire the mercy of God, in thus calling sinners. He might justly punish ; but he calls, entreats, and warns, before he strikes ; he does all that can be done for reclaiming them. How kind and gracious are those words ! Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

2. Let such as have obeyed the calls of God rejoice therein ; they

have cause of eternal joy and eternal thankfulness. They are called to his fellowship here, and to his glory hereafter. Rev. xix. 9.

3. Let such as have shut their ears against the calls of God be persuaded now to hearken to them. O sinner! let this exhortation find thee out: harden thy heart no more; shut thine ear no more: all nature obeys, and wilt thou not? How protracted, how frequent, how importunate have been his calls to thee! What will be the consequence of thy obstinacy? The blow will fall heavy at last, after so many gracious warnings. O come to a speedy resolution: time and life are wasting: the season of grace is a short one; its day will soon be over. O now hearken to God; be obedient to his call; turn to him, repenting and believing. Now do it. "The night cometh," &c. John ix. 4.

THE THIRSTY SOUL INVITED TO THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE.

In the last day, that great day, &c.—John vii. 37.

THE feast here referred to, is the feast of tabernacles; it lasted eight days, and the first and last days were the greatest, the last especially. On that day the priests used to bring water from the pool of Siloam, to offer it to the Lord, while they sang: "With joy shall ye draw water from the wells of salvation." Our Lord improved the circumstance of inviting the people to partake of the water of life. "If any man thirst," &c.

In speaking on this subject, I shall attend to the following method:

1. I shall show what it is to which our Saviour here invites us.

He says, "Let him come unto me and drink." It is spoken in a figurative and metaphorical manner. Thus our Saviour calls himself "the bread of life," "the meat which endureth to everlasting life," &c. John vi. 27, 35. And our coming to Christ, to drink, signifies our receiving from him all those spiritual and eternal blessings that he has to bestow upon us. John i. 16.

But to be more particular. Let us consider the blessings that Christ invites us to come to him for, and which we may freely and abundantly drink and partake of at this fountain of life.

1. The pardon of sin. It is only through Christ that we can obtain the blessing. He obtained it for us by his death. He conferred it upon many. Matt. ix. 2. Luke vii. 48.

2. The knowledge of the truth. Without Christ we wander in doubts and uncertainties, and are subject to innumerable mistakes. Jer. ix. 23. If we would walk surely, we must follow him. John viii. 12. Col. ii.

3. He says, "Learn of me." Matt. ix. 29.

3. Grace for sanctification. For this reason he is said to come by water and by blood, because he can sanctify as well as justify. Eph. v. 27. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

4. Spiritual consolation. He gives rest to the weary soul. Matt. xi. 28. And was anointed to comfort those who mourn. Isa. lxi. 2. And this he does by his word, his Spirit, his presence, and the prospect of

glory. We read of only one that left him in sorrow, Matt. xix. 22, but many in joy. Luke xix. 6. Acts viii. 39.

5. Eternal happiness. None can give us this but himself. He has it in his power, and at his disposal. It is the fruit of his sufferings and death. There he can give us the sight and enjoyment of God, and there he has promised to lead us to living fountains, &c. Rev. vii. 17.

II. To whom this invitation is given.

1. The text tells us that it is given to any man that thirsts. This invitation is not limited. Formerly the Jews claimed the exclusive privilege of being God's people; but now both Jews and Gentiles are invited to Jesus Christ. Acts xi. 18; x. 34, 35. This the prophets foretold. Isa. lx. 3. Matt. xii. 21.

2. Not only is it given to all nations, but to every kind of sinners; however great, numerous, or long-standing their sins may be. He healed bodily diseases that had continued many years. John v. 5, 6. And the same Physician can cure spiritual diseases, of the longest standing. His blood cleanses from all sin. 1 John i. 7. He came to save the chief of sinners. 1 Tim. i. 15. He saved a persecuting Saul, he prayed for his murderers, and made the first offers of mercy to those who despised and crucified him. He will cast none out. John vi. 37.

But what is this thirsting after Christ? It must be metaphorical, as is also the invitation to come to him and drink. It is the thirst of the soul and implies,

1. A sense of the want of Christ: that we want him for justification, comfort, peace, sanctification, and eternal glory; and that we must perish without him.

2. A sense of the worth of Christ: that he is most excellent, our only Physician and Saviour, able to supply every want, heal every disease, and save to the uttermost. Heb. vii. 25.

3. An ardent and vehement desire after him, as cannot rest but in him, longing to taste the sweetness of his pardon, grace, love, comfort, and salvation. The thirsting soul cries out for Christ, as Rachel did for her children. Gen. xxx. 1. Or with the woman of Samaria. John iv. 15. Or with the people. John vi. 34.

III. The reasons why we ought to comply with this invitation.

1. The consideration of the person who invites us. It was Jesus that stood up and "cried," &c. God's "beloved Son:" he invited us before by the prophets, but now by his Son. Matt. xxi. 36, 37. As such, he can give us every blessing we want: he is desirous we should come: he is earnest in inviting us: he "stood and cried:" so also in Rev. iii. 20. He even shed tears over unbelieving Jerusalem.

2. The consideration of our own wants. How bad is our state by nature! we are in bondage to sin, liable to affliction, pain and death; and to what is worse, uneasiness and horrors of soul, fearful apprehensions of wrath, &c. Nor can we help ourselves. Rom. v. 6. Not only without strength, but hope and God. Eph. ii. 12. But let us come to Christ, and all will be well.

3. The consideration of those blessings to which we are invited: saving knowledge, pardon of sin, the grace of God, spiritual consolations, consummate and eternal glory.

4. The welcome that others have found from Christ. He has made them the sons of God. John i. 12. Paul received his abundant grace. 1 Tim. i. 14. And Peter speaks of others tasting the goodness of the Lord. 1 Pet. ii. 3.

5. The benefits to which we are invited can be obtained nowhere else. Christ is the only fountain that sends forth these streams of salvation to mankind. There is no other mediator but Christ, no other sacrifice for sin but his. Heb. x. 26. Acts. iv. 12. Life is only in him and by him. John. i. 4; 1 John v. 11, 12.

I come now to the application. And,

1. Let us admire the kindness and condescension of the Redeemer, who prevents us by his goodness, inviting and receiving those who seek him not. "If any man thirst." See the case of Zaccheus, Luke xix. 1—10.

2. Let sinners endeavour to obtain this thirst after Christ, and not indulge that thirst they may feel for the pleasures, honours, and profits of the world, which can be of no use to them in death and eternity; but feel what David felt. Ps. xlii. 1, 2. It is this thirst alone that can render Christ sweet to us. "If any man thirst," &c. See also Rev. xxii. 17; Isa. lv. 1; Jer. xxxi. 25.

3. Let those who thirst go to Christ and drink. Let them not stay from him, and perish, but obey the call, and go: apply to him by faith, and cast themselves upon his mercy. He would never invite you if he were unwilling to receive you. Pray with the spouse, Cant. i. 4; and he will help you.

4. Let those who have drank of these living waters be filled with joy, praise, and thanksgiving. They should be of good cheer, Matt. ix. 2, and praise God with joyful lips. Ps. lxiii. 5. 1 Thess. ii. 12, 13.

THE ORACLES OF THE LIVING GOD

PRESERVED AND PUBLISHED BY HIS CHURCH.

That thou mayest know, &c.—1 Tim. iii. 15.

THE design of the context, as also of the text, is obvious. The apostle abounds with directions to his young favourite, Timothy, to preserve the faith, establish order, government, and discipline in the church; and to excite him thereto, he gives a lofty description of the importance and dignity of that society of which he was now an overseer and ruler.

Glorious things are said of this city of our God, the spouse of Jesus Christ; and especially in the text, where she is called "the house of God," &c.

To unfold the subject contained in this passage, I propose

To illustrate each of the characters given of this sacred corporation, which we call the church.

I. It is called the house of God. Here is a manifest allusion to Solomon's temple, where God dwelt; there was the Shechinah and the cherubims; his court, I may say, and his immediate attendants. The same

name is here given to the New Testament church, as composed of the whole body of believers in Christ, of every name, sect, and party. This, too, is the house of God. For,

1. He built it, and beautifies it. Zech. iv. 6. It is described in Eph. ii. 19, 20. Mount Zion of old was beautiful; but this excels in glory, in truths divine: the beauty of holiness, which are her chief ornaments.

2. He resides and rules there. There he will always be found. Matt. xxviii. 20. He has given a body of laws, by which his will is expressed; has established an order and ordinances, stewards and servants in her, all of whom are under his direction.

3. He is tenderly concerned for her. All that are in the house are his purchase, workmanship, and property; hence his defence of it. Isa. xxvii. 3. So also it is well provided for within: there is grace for grace, milk for babes, and strong meat for those of age.

II. It is called the church of the living God; and is called so in opposition to the heathen temples, dedicated to the service of inanimate deities. But more particularly I would observe,

1. That when life is ascribed to God, we are to understand all his perfections, the power and actual exertion of them. This life is in God, independently, originally, and eternally. He is the fountain of life. Acts. xvii. 28.

2. This life is in Christ, as Immanuel, and head of the church. John i. 16. This exhaustless store is treasured up in him, that he may communicate life to the church, which is his body. John i. 16.

3. The faithful are the church of the living God in a peculiar sense, and by relations sacred and tender. She is his by eternal destination and choice. Eph. i. 4, 5. A costly price was paid for her ransom. Eph. v. 25—27. She is his by conquest. By express stipulation and covenant, by cordial consent on her part, and possession on his. She is his heritage, reward, glory, and so dear to him.

4. As the proprietor of the universe, he may reside in it where he will, by the symbols of his gracious presence; but of all places, the church is the beloved spot where he makes his abode. Ps. lxxxvii. 2. He is gone to receive a kingdom, but has left behind his gospel, its ministry and ordinances, his Spirit to act in his name, till he himself return in glory.

III. It is called the pillar and ground of truth. The expression is metaphorical, and alludes to the form of their buildings in the East, which sometimes stood upon pillars. Judges xvi. 26, 29. Ps. lxxv. 3.

The pillar and ground are not two distinct things, but one; the pillar and the base, which firmly sustains what is erected on it. But to explain this further, let us consider,

1. That the church is not the pillar and ground of truth, in that sense which the church of Rome contends for; arrogating to herself infallibility, and admitting that only as truth, which she declares to be so. This doctrine of popery is erecting a pillar without a base or a foundation.

2. When the church is called the pillar and ground of truth, it points out her duty to publish and maintain the gospel or mysteries of redemption. To her is committed the lively oracles of God; but she has no authority to alter or add to the sacred volume, far less to disguise, adul-

terate, or lock it up. These, and such like duties, are incumbent on Christian pastors, would they behave themselves suitably in the house of God, which is the pillar, &c.

I shall now improve the subject. And,

1. Let me inquire whether you belong to this house and family. It is a household of faith. They are fellow-citizens with the saints, in different degrees, it is true; but holiness to the Lord is the spirit and complexion of them all.

2. Let such take heed that they behave as members of God's house and family; that they honour, worship, and obey their heavenly Father; the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the first-born among the many brethren; and the holy and eternal Spirit, who animates the whole building, and preserves it in order and beauty, sanctity and strength.

And take heed how you behave towards the children, &c. of this house: let it be with much esteem, love, and good-will, bearing one another's burdens, &c.

3. In the text we have a distinguishing and decisive mark of the church of Christ. She is the pillar and ground of truth: in her is found the faith once delivered to the saints. Such a society, though driven to the wilderness, or dwelling in a cottage, is the house and church of the living God. 2 John ver. 2. There was the religion of Jesus, and of protestants, long before the Reformation and Luther; and there only will it be found in ages to come.

Lastly. I speak as unto wise men: judge ye what title the church of Rome has to these characters in my text; but nothing short of these is her claim, and that exclusive of all the other churches of Christ. The effrontery of a common prostitute, making high professions of chastity, is not more offensive, than that claim of the mother of abominations. Alas! how unlike is she to the house and church of the living God! Can falsehood and filthiness, barbarity and bloodshed, be any part, or the ornaments of a building, where the perfection of beauty and goodness dwells?

The dreadful thunderings of the papal chair have in a great measure ceased; yet still we hear of the Pope's bulls against the Bible Society, and the dissemination of the word of God; a shrewd presumption that popery is always the same, though policy, or want of power, on some occasions, may smooth its aspect and restrain its cruelty. 2 Thess. ii. 9—12.

Look to yourselves, brethren, that having received the truth in the love of it, ye be not soon shaken in your mind, nor led away with the error of the wicked, and craftiness of men; but stand fast in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel.

WAITING UPON GOD,

CONNECTED WITH FRESH SUCCOURS FROM HIM.

They that wait upon the Lord, &c.—Isa. xl. 31.

THE prophet, in the close of the preceding chapter, having delivered a sad message about the captivity of the Jews, begins this with a word of

comfort. Verses 1, 2. Next follows a prophecy of John the Baptist, &c. Ver. 3, &c. Then of Christ himself. Verses 5—11. In verses 27, 28, our doubts and distrusts are reproved; after which follows the gracious promise in the text. "They that wait," &c. I shall consider,

I. The duty here recommended; waiting on the Lord.

1. What we are to wait for.

In general, for every blessing that we stand in need of. Particularly,

For temporal mercies: a supply of our wants, preservation in dangers, deliverance from troubles. Prov. xx. 22. Ps. lxii. 1, 2; cxlv. 15.

Spiritual mercies: guidance and direction, grace, assistance, strength, and comfort. Ps. xxv. 5; xxvii. 14. Eternal mercies: the patient waiting for Christ. 2 Thess. iii. 5. For his Son from heaven. 1 Thess. i. 10.

2. Where are we to wait upon the Lord? In the way of private duty: holy walking with God in meditation, in prayer: secret prayer, especially, has been a successful way of waiting upon God.

In the way of public ordinances: the words of the text have generally been applied this way. Those who expect to prosper in the ways of God, must keep close to his ordinances. If we slight them, God will slight us. Mal. iii. 7. These are to believers, what the pool of Siloam was of old to the Jews; the Spirit of grace and comfort moves in holy waters; here he takes away our infirmities, troubles, doubts, and fears, and gives us soundness, strength, peace, and joy. Thus was it with holy David. Ps. cxxii. 1; lxxxiv. 1—3.

3. In what manner are we to wait upon God?

In the exercise of those graces which his word requires.

With faith, believing that he is able and willing to fulfil the promises that he has made unto us. Matt. xxi. 22. In vain do we wait upon him in ordinances without it. Heb. xi. 6; iv. 2.

With patience we must guard against murmuring, on the account of any apparent delay; and submit in all cases to God's will and God's time. Ps. xl. 1. Hence the patience of the husbandman is recommended to us in scripture. With holy obedience we are to "trust in the Lord, and do good." If we do not strive to please God, we must not expect any thing from him. Isa. vi. 4, 5.

II. The encouragement here given to wait upon the Lord. Such shall renew their strength.

When it seems spent and worn out with long expectations, sharp trials, pressing afflictions, they shall nevertheless renew it; have fresh supplies; wax stronger and stronger. Ps. lxxxiv. 7.

But to be more particular; the strength that such shall receive is,

1. Strength to perform all the duties they are called to. He will not deal with them as Pharaoh did with the Israelites, but grant daily strength. Isa. xxxiii. 2. 2 Thess. i. 11. 2 Cor. ix. 8.

2. Strength to support them in all their troubles and afflictions: their patience, faith, and courage, he will sustain: carry them through every rough way and deep water. Isa. xli. 10. Hab. iii. 18, 19. Ps. xli. 3. 2 Cor. iv. 16. 1 Cor. x. 13. 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.

Now, that God will thus strengthen them that wait upon him, will appear, when we consider,

1. The experience of those who are gone before us. Of David. Ps.

cxxxviii. 3. Of Daniel. viii. 19. Of Paul. Phil. iv. 13. And of others spoken of by John. 1 John ii. 14.

2. The divine nature and perfections. His mercy will lead him to do so. He delights in mercy. His truth, which will perform what he hath promised. Ps. cxlvi. 6—8.

3. Waiting upon God is a mean of his own appointing, that we may renew our strength; and if he has appointed it, he will own it. This is clear from the text, and also from Ps. xcii. 13, 14. 1 Pet. ii. 2. Acts xx. 32. Improvement:

1. Let those stand reprov'd who do not quietly and humbly wait upon God. There are too many of this kind. It was so with Job; xvii. 13, 15; and David, Ps. xxii. 2.

2. Exhort to this holy, humble waiting upon God. Wait upon him in the darkest night of adversity; and although he seems to frown upon you, yet still wait upon him. Thus they did. Isa. xxvi. 8. While you wait, you are in the way of mercies, and you will certainly meet with them at last, as the apostle exhorts. Heb. x. 35.

3. A word of encouragement to those that do wait upon the Lord. You shall not wait in vain. Your waiting shall be rewarded. It will turn to a blessed account at last. Ps. xxvii. 14.

THE NATURE AND BENEFIT OF EARNEST PRAYER.

And he said, Let me go, &c.—Gen. xxxii. 26.

THE patriarch Jacob was now on his return to Canaan, having escaped the fraud and violence of Laban. He dreaded the vengeance of his brother Esau, coming against him with an armed force. He has recourse to prayer. He is left alone, and is found wrestling with an angel (Jesus, the prince of angels) till day-break. “Let me go,” said the angel, “for the day breaketh:” and he said, “I will not let thee go,” &c. As we are called to imitate his example, I shall,

I. Point out the blessings, the chief of them at least, which we ought to strive for in prayer.

Whatever God has promised to us, relating to this life, or that which is to come, may be the subject of our request to him. In particular,

1. We should plead to be justified freely by his grace, that we may have the remission of sin. This God hath promised. Heb. viii. 12. Blessed is the man who is in such a case. Ps. xxxii. 1, 2.

2. We ought to ask the blessing of the Holy Spirit, called the blessing of Abraham. Gal. iii. 14. His influence is procured by the death of Christ. He is the source of every good effect upon the soul. He awakens, illumines, comforts, sanctifies, and seals, to the day of redemption.

3. The good things of the world, with protection from its dangers and destructive evils. Thus our Lord teaches; Matt. vi. 13; and thus prayed Jacob. Gen. xxviii. 20, 21. As to comforts and conveniences, we must be moderate and modest. Agur’s prayer must be ours. Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

II. In what manner we ought to wrestle for these blessings, so as to obtain them.

In general as Jacob did, who wept and made supplication ; had power with the angel, and prevailed. Hos. xii. 4. But more particularly we observe,

1. That earnestness and importunity ought to be the chief ingredients in this sacred contest. Indifference about eternal concerns is indeed to vilify them. How earnest was Moses ; Ex. xxxiii. 18 ; Jabez ; 1 Chron. iv. 10 ; Job xxiii. 3 ; David. Ps. xlii. 1, 2.

2. With humility ought we to wrestle for the blessing, that ornament of great price in the sight of God. This was the disposition of the patriarch. Gen. xxxii. 10. And in Hos. xii. 4, where he is said to have wept, and made supplication. Thus should we be abased in our addresses to that high and lofty One, before whom angels are veiled.

3. Consistently with this, we ought to wrestle for the blessing, with confidence and hope, not with distrust or doubt of success. John xv. 7. Like Jacob, we should put the Lord in remembrance, and plead his promises. Verses 9 and 12 of this chapter.

4. Would we wrestle successfully, and obtain the blessing, we must persevere. 1 Thess. v. 17. Luke xviii. 1. Though there be delays, and the returns of prayer are not so soon as you expected, do not give up the cause. Nay, though there be discouragements, and seeming refusals, do not weary. He has blessed them, whom he yet made lame, as in the case of this patriarch ; and although apparently deaf to our cry for a season, yet he has heard it at last, and answered. Matt. xv. 21—28.

I shall now make a reflection or two, and then conclude. And,

1. We cannot but admire the condescension of the angel of the covenant in this interview. At all times, in all places, and in every condition, the humble may have access to him ; at midnight, and through the day, in the fields and in the closet, in the depth of adversity, as well as in prosperity. How indulgent and bounteous is he to this distressed pilgrim ! And thus will he deal with every faithful, fervent soul.

2. Why is this instructive and interesting history so minutely recorded ? For admonition, surely, as a pattern for our imitation. Let impious and wanton wittlings set their mouths against the heavens ; and, in their pride of heart, disdain to call on God : but prayer is a just tribute to God, and very becoming the creature, whose burdens and wants, cares and miseries, temptations and dangers, are numberless. O how comfortable to unload the heart of these, by casting all our cares upon him ! Herein let us imitate our Saviour. Heb. v. 7. Animated by these motives, let us draw nigh with a true heart, and faith unfeigned. Phil. iv. 6.

DIVINE SONSHIP EVIDENCED,

BY OUR BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, &c.—Rom. viii. 14.

It is of the greatest importance that we have some satisfactory evidence that we are the children of God ; much depends upon it. It will sup-

port us under all our afflictions, and encourage us in the performance of every Christian duty.

The text itself gives us a mark whereby we may know whether we are the children of God: they "are led by the Spirit."

In discoursing from these words, I shall,

I. Endeavour to show that we should submit ourselves to be led by the Spirit of God.

But how are we to be led by the Spirit of God?

1. As to our faith. We are to receive whatever he has revealed to us, with humility and thankfulness, as to the Divine Being and perfections, the great Redeemer, the works of Providence, the methods of grace, or the hope of salvation and glory. We are not to follow the opinions and fancies of men, but the Spirit of Truth. Thus we are often cautioned. 2 Pet. iii. 17. 1 John iv. 1.

2. As to our practice. We should conform to that holy, spiritual, and heavenly life which he recommends. Gal. v. 25. Rom. viii. 1.

We may also consider the reasons why we should submit to this Divine leading.

1. Because of the Spirit's sufficiency to lead and guide us. He can teach us the whole will of God, the complete knowledge of Christ, the way to attain everlasting blessedness. John xiv. 26. 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11.

2. Because he is the Spirit of Truth. He cannot deceive us; he cannot lead us out of the way. The knowledge he reveals is the knowledge of the truth of God. He is called the Spirit of Truth. John xiv. 17. 1 John v. 6.

3. Because we cannot find any where else the guidance and direction we need. Other leaders, without God's Spirit, will only lead us into darkness, error, and destruction. What is our own understanding? Prov. iii. 5, 6. And the best and most judicious writers are yet fallible.

4. Because they that follow him walk in the most excellent way. 1 Cor. xii. 31. They who walk in it, live to much better purpose than the men of the world. Prov. xii. 26. Such are of an excellent spirit. Prov. xvii. 27.

5. Because they that follow him walk in the safest way. The way of sin is full of snares and dangers: though at first setting out all seems calm and fair, yet the storm soon overtakes them. Ps. i. 6. But the way of God's Spirit is safe. 1 Pet. iii. 13. Prov. iii. 21—23. We shall be safe from worldly dangers, they shall not hurt us. Ps. xci. 4, 5. From spiritual dangers; the Spirit will guard us against sin and Satan; from eternal dangers; the second death shall not hurt them. Rom. viii. 1. Gal. v. 18.

6. Because they that walk in him, walk in the most pleasant way. His way is full of delights. Prov. iii. 17. Rom. xiv. 17. Gal. v. 22. They can rejoice in his pardoning and adopting grace; in his presence and love; in their spiritual privileges and consolations; in their outward things; their habitation is blessed; their going out and coming in, &c.

II. That such as are thus led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. This is the difference betwixt them and others. I shall here show,

1. What it is to be the sons of God. What sonship signifies in a natural sense, it also signifies in a spiritual sense. It implies nearness of relation to God, and a special interest in him.

As there is a twofold sonship among men, so is it also in a spiritual sense.

Among men, there are children by adoption ; and this is the case with true believers. To this purpose we read, Gal. iv. 5. Eph. i. 5.

Others, among men, are children by generation ; which is the case also with real Christians, who are regenerated and born again of the Spirit. John i. 13. 1 Pet. i. 23.

2. That to be the sons of God, is a most excellent privilege ; and this will appear, when we consider the source whence it springs, the love of God. 1 John iii. 1. The Saviour and price which purchased it ; Christ and his blood. The benefits connected with it : God, as a father, will pity us in affliction ; Ps. ciii. 13 ; deliver us ; Ex. iv. 22, 23 ; supply our wants ; Matt. vi. 26. Ps. xxiii. 1, 2, 5 ; and be his heirs. Rom. viii. 17.

3. The certainty, that they who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. And this will appear, when we consider,

That those who are led by the Spirit of God are obedient to God. "His we are whom we obey." Rom. vi. 16. Acts xxvii. 23. 1 John ii. 5. 1 Pet. i. 14. Obedience is a fruit of being born of God, and therefore an evidence of it. 1 Pet. i. 22, 23.

They have God's image and likeness upon them. They are like him, and therefore they are his children. They follow him. Eph. v. 1. They resemble him in holiness, goodness, truth, and righteousness ; in all his imitable perfections.

They love him, and are therefore his children. Though such a relation be hidden, yet love reveals it : hence our desires to God's name, and the remembrance of him, our delight in him, and the value we set upon him. If love to the brethren demonstrates our sonship, much more so our love to God.

They have God's love discovered to them, and are therefore his sons. As they love God, so he manifests to them that he loves them. John xiv. 23. Rom. v. 5. Application :

1. Beware of being led by your own lusts, instead of the Spirit of God. There are but too many of this description. Tit. iii. 3. Jude verse 18. Such will have a dreadful account to give. Eccl. xi. 9.

2. Beware of being led by the examples and customs of the world, of that neglect of religion, that lightness, vanity, sensuality, and love of earthly things, that you see in others. Run not with the multitude to do evil. Rom. xii. 2.

3. Take care that you be not, through a mistake, led by a false spirit. There are many such. 1 John iv. 1. There is a spirit of error and delusion ; let us guard against it, and try ourselves by 1 John iv. 6. The spirit of pride is not God's Spirit, but meekness and humility ; nor the spirit of contention, but of quietness and peace ; nor the spirit of bitterness, reviling, and persecution, but of forbearance and love. God's Spirit is a spirit of love. 2 Tim. i. 7.

4. See that you are led by the Spirit of God. Let him rule in you, as well as dwell in you. You must walk after the Spirit. Rom. viii. 1.

5. Think not that you are the sons of God, unless you are led and guided by the Spirit of God. He that hath not God's Spirit, is none of his. Such a one is a child of Satan, and not a child of God.

FAITH THE MEANS OF THE CHRISTIAN'S VICTORY.

And this is the victory, &c.—1 John v. 4.

THE principal design of this epistle is to lay down a variety of remarks, by which the children of God are distinguished from the children of the devil ; and of these none are more striking than their different dispositions to the things of this world. To the unrenewed man, these things are his treasure, his portion and chief delight ; while the other minds spiritual things, and has the world under his feet. Rev. xii. 1. His hand is indeed busied about the world, but his heart is given to God. "For he that is born of God," &c. From these words we are led to consider,

I. What is meant by the world, represented in them as an enemy which must be overcome.

In scripture, the world is usually taken in a bad sense ; it is said to lie in wickedness, or the wicked one ; we are not to love it.

The things of the world, from which we are in danger, and against which we are to guard, are,

1. The good things of the world, its profits, pleasures, and preferments. These things are always present : they dazzle and deceive. How many have been ruined by avarice, and the lust of wealth ! See the young man in Matt. xix. 22 ; and Demas, 2 Tim. iv. 10.

What havoc do sensual pleasures make upon the body, fortune, reputation, and the soul ! Prov. v. 7—11.

How intoxicating are titles and worldly honours ! What mighty struggles will men make to arrive at the pinnacle of their glory ! and, when attained, is walking in a vain show, in a transient blaze of splendour.

2. The world may be called our enemy, on account of the evils of it. Meeting with sharp trials, like Israel of old, we are apt to murmur against God. How many have yielded through fear of suffering ! It led Abraham to dissemble, one disciple to deny his Master, and all to forsake him. Satan knows the force of this trial. Job i. 11.

3. The men of this world may be accounted an enemy ; their corrupt principles and wicked examples are infectious, and over many have the authority of a law. The snares from this quarter are numberless : hence the advice of Solomon. Prov. i. 10.

II. What that faith is whereby we overcome the world, and how it is the means of this victory.

1. It is a general belief in the Christian revelation, delivered to us in the gospel, as coming from God.

2. A particular belief in Jesus Christ, as the Son of God. Ver. 5.

3. It is a receiving Christ with all our heart as the gift of God ; as our Saviour and prince, to redeem, renew, rule over us, till he brings us to glory. John i. 11, 12.

4. It is such a faith as has connected with it the regeneration of the soul, or a new birth ; verse 1 ; love to God ; verse 3 ; love to all the saints ; verse 4 ; and the witness of the Spirit. Verse 10. Rom. viii. 15.

16. Now it is that Christ dwells in the heart by faith. Eph. iii. 17. And the vigorous exercise of that faith, is very instrumental to the victory, inasmuch as,

1. It regards the sufferings of Christ in their atoning virtue, depending thereon for fresh supplies of strength and every blessing, through which alone we can travel along the thorny road, and trample the world under our feet, Gal. vi. 14.

2. As it looks to Christ, his disposition and conduct towards persons and things, while he was in the world. How humble and self-denied was he! how poor, reproached, persecuted, and crucified, and yet how content and resigned! It was thus he overcame the world, as our representative, and if we follow him we are sure to obtain the victory. John xvi. 33.

3. As it is the firm belief of the promise of his Spirit and grace, and relies upon him for the accomplishment in every time of need. The example of Christ points out the way; the other, taking us by the hand, assists us to go. The one leads us on to the conflict, the other strengthens our hands to war, and our fingers to fight. Without this constant supply of the Spirit, our hearts would soon sink, and we should give up the contest. But believing in the promises, we are made strong, and come off more than conquerors. Rom. viii. 37.

4. As it persuades us of the truth of an eternal world, which we are soon to enter upon, and a weight of glory, to be enjoyed there. Sense puts the evil day afar off! but faith overlooks the short interval between the present hour and our dissolution, and sees the end of all things to be at hand. This faith eclipses the fading glories of the world, as the stars disappear before the rising sun, and brings down the value of its boasted treasures to nothing. It reconciles the Christian to the cross, upon beholding so glorious a crown before him. Rom. viii. 18.

To conclude:

1. What has been said may assist you to unmask, and make a true estimate of this world, which we are passing through. To the bulk of mankind, this world is their god; let it not be so with you. You are strangers on this earth. If your accommodations are good, set not your hearts upon them; if bad, be not cast down.

2. Since you are engaged in a warfare where the only alternative is conquest or final ruin, put on the armour of God, quit you like men, and endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; and thus, though the conflict may be sharp, it will not be long, the victory sure, and the reward glorious. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

3. We may now see the reason, why many, who are called Christians, instead of overcoming, are overcome by the world, and are tamely serving divers lusts and pleasures: they have not faith, or if they once had it, they have made shipwreck of it, like those mentioned, 1 Tim. i. 19, 20. Well might David pray, "Lord, save me from worldly men," &c. Ps. xvii. 14, 15.

TRUE BELIEVERS THE CHILDREN OF GOD.

For ye are all the children of God, &c.—Gal. iii. 26.

In the context the apostle shows the superior excellency of the gospel dispensation to that of the law. Those who were under it, were “shut up,” &c. Verse 23. It was only as a schoolmaster, &c. Verse 24. The blessings of heaven are no longer confined to one nation, but extend to all; verse 28; and especially to all true believers: “For ye are all the children of God,” &c. I shall,

I. Consider the sonship of believers under the gospel.

I need scarcely observe, that believers are not the sons of God in the same sense as our blessed Lord, whose generation is ineffable; being one in nature, perfections, and glory with the Father. But,

1. In common with the other intelligent creatures of God. In this respect, they have all one Father. In a peculiar manner, he is the Father of Spirits. In the intellectual powers, moral endowments, and immortality of the soul, they resemble him, for these are his image. Hence angels are called his sons, and Adam, the son of God; nay, the whole human race is said to be his offspring. Acts xvii. 29.

2. They are children of God by their external profession, and a peculiar relation to him. In this sense Israel is called his first-born, and his son. Hos. xi. 1. Matt. ii. 15.

3. This sonship consists chiefly in their regeneration and adoption. By the last there is a change in their state. Formerly they were the slaves of Satan, and rebels; but now the friends of God, as was Abraham. By regeneration there is a change in their principles, disposition, and practice. They are born again, 1 Pet. i. 23, and are partakers of the Divine nature. The resemblance is real, though greatly inferior to the original. Hence God is not ashamed to be called their God, nor is Christ ashamed to call them brethren. Which leads me to observe,

4. That this sonship is not a mere title or mark of distinction, but has privileges the most excellent annexed to it: there is no condemnation to them: they are his temples: led by his Spirit: abide in their Father’s house; yea, in his heart and love: but particularly,

They have a title to incorruption and immortality, or a blessed resurrection. The body must die, but it is redeemed as well as the soul; was his habitation, while here, through the Spirit, and an instrument in his service; and he will raise it again. Rom. viii. 23.

They are born to a great inheritance. Though children of wrath by nature, yet, in virtue of adoption, they are heirs of salvation with eternal glory. They are heirs of God himself, Rom. viii. 17, and have indeed a goodly heritage. Ps. xvi. 5.

5. This sonship is equally the privilege of every believer in Christ. “Ye are all the children of God,” says the apostle. They may be distinguished from each other, as to external circumstances in life, spiritual gifts and graces, but their filial relation is the same.

6. It is a privilege of which they are conscious, and hence they enjoy the comfort of it: with holy confidence, they cry, “Abba, Father;”

Gal. iv. 6; and delight in approaching to him, with a childlike, holy boldness in prayer.

II. How it is that they attain to this privilege and dignity? The text says, by faith in Christ Jesus. To illustrate this, it may be proper to recollect,

1. That in the state of primitive innocence, Adam was truly the son of God: he resembled God. Gen. i. 27. This resemblance was effaced by sin, his former relation to God as his son then ceased, and he was turned out of God's family and garden as a rebel, while he and his numerous progeny became children of disobedience and wrath.

2. It is by faith, or a supernatural revelation only, that we are informed how this high prerogative of sonship may be regained. This surpassed the capacity of the wisest philosopher, and even of angels themselves. It is brought to light by the gospel. Gal. iv. 4, 5.

What a marvellous climax, and cluster of Divine prodigies are here! Recount them with admiration! The mission and incarnation of God's own Son: his abject condition as a servant, under the grievous yoke of the law: himself a ransom for the slaves of sin: these slaves taken into fellowship with himself: to whom he grants this Divine filiation!

3. We become the children of God, when we cordially believe in Christ: we are thereby brought into union with Christ, and into a dear relation to God, as his Father and ours. We are then born of God, and have the principle or seed of the life of God in the soul; and, consequently, are his children, and in an adopted state; suitable to that relation. John i. 12. To conclude:

1. From what has been said, let me address the children of God in the words of the beloved apostle, 1 John iii. 1. Be astonished, ye heavenly principalities and powers, to see such base-born slaves, and rebellious creatures taken into the family of God; rank in dignity with you, and made heirs of the same inheritance. Unmeasurable love!

The immunities and glory of the adopted state are beyond description. It is an adoption procured at an infinite price, and elevates to high honour. "Is it a light thing," said David, "to be the king's son-in-law?" But what is this when compared to that of being the sons and daughters of the Almighty?

2. Forget not the love and duty, submission and service, that result from this relation. "If I be a father," says God, "where is mine honour?"

Should not this filial relation reconcile you to the cross, though heavy? It is the lot assigned by Infinite Wisdom, and sent in great kindness. Heb. xii. 6.

Are you indeed of the same family and Father? What a mighty motive is this to love as brethren, to be pitiful and courteous, and kindly affected one to another; forbearing and forgiving one another! &c.

While mingled here with the children of this world, be watchful lest you imbibe their spirit, learn their ways and vices, stain your character, and be a scandal to your profession. Remember that you have in you the blood-royal of heaven, and being washed in the blood of Jesus from your sins, return not to wallow in the mire; "that ye may be blameless." Phil. ii. 15.

3. How insipid, alas! are subjects of this kind to the generality

even of gospel hearers! Show them how to acquire a fortune, &c. and they will be all attention; but publish the riches of God's gracious adoption, they relish it not. Blinded sinner, what a fatal choice dost thou make! What though thou hadst the wisdom of a Solomon, the wealth of a Cræsus, the beauty of an Absalom, and were as high in dignity and power as ever Haman was, if thou art not a child of God, thou shalt at last lie down in sorrow, and be brought out of the grave to the day, the dreadful day of the perdition of ungodly men. 2 Pet. iii. 7.

MEDITATION ON GOD,

THE PLEASURE OF A SAINT.

My meditation of him shall be sweet.—Ps. civ. 34.

SENSUAL objects, unworthy as they are, are yet too apt to engage the whole attention of men. Any thing is more entertaining to them than the God that formed them: him they forget, who ought to be remembered before all: him they have no time to think of, from whom every moment of their life is received.

But if we would think seriously with ourselves, we should find it to be both our duty and our happiness to meditate much on God. The holy Psalmist knew well the work of holy meditation, as well as the rewards of it: hence the text, "My meditation," &c.

In speaking from this passage, I shall,

I. Show how we should meditate on God.

It implies a serious and fixed employing of the thoughts upon him, the mind should dwell upon him, as the eyes do upon a delightful object. The nature of holy meditation is set forth to us in those words of the Psalmist, "How precious are thy thoughts," &c. Ps. cxxxix. 17.

But that which I shall especially consider under this head is, wherein God should be the object of a Christian's meditation.

1. We should meditate upon the perfections of God: his immensity and eternity, to fill us with fear and reverence; his power, as our protection and defence; his wisdom, to fill us with praise and admiration; his holiness, to excite us to imitate him, and to abhor sin; his truth, to encourage our belief in his promises; his justice, to make us dread being obnoxious to his wrath, and to magnify his judgments to ourselves and others; his goodness, which is the sweetest theme to employ our thoughts upon, it being his most amiable perfection. Well might David say, "We have thought of thy loving-kindness," &c. Ps. xlviii. 9.

2. Upon his works. His works of creation. Thus we read: "The works of the Lord are great," &c. Ps. cxi. 2. David was thus employed. Ps. viii. 3. We should admire his works, and adore the great Architect: we are exhorted to it. Job xxxvi. 24, 25.

Also, upon his works of providence. How wisely and graciously God governs, preserves, and provides for his creatures, and upholds the world he has formed, and his special providences towards ourselves, and keep a memorial of them!

Finally, upon the work of redemption. God sending his son into the world in our nature, to suffer and die, and so make atonement for sin,

and purchase for us pardon and life. Herein the perfections of God are wonderfully displayed.

3. Upon his word. Christ requires it. John v. 39. In this is the godly man's delight. See David, Ps. cxix. 11, and 92. And Moses recommended it to the children of Israel. Deut. xi. 18; vi. 6, 7. The word of God should dwell in us richly: it should be often in our hands, but oftener in our hearts.

4. Upon the future glory of God. If heaven were more in our thoughts, we should lead a more heavenly life. That heavenly glory should draw up our hearts to it, as the sun draweth up the vapours from the earth. The mind will continually run out towards what it loves and desires, whatever else employs it; and so will our minds go after heaven, if it truly be our love and desire. Like the apostle, we will "rejoice," &c. Rom. v. 2.

II. At what special times we should meditate on God. He desires to be in all our thoughts, and the continual companion of our minds, and the delight of our souls. But we should meditate upon him more especially,

1. In our seasons of private retirement: then the mind enjoys itself most, and then it may enjoy God most. Solitude is the greatest friend to meditation. Let them fly from solitude who have no God to converse with; it is a burden to such: but, to a gracious soul, it is better than all society. In a word, let me be any where if God be with me; but no place will do without him. We read of Isaac, that "he went out to meditate," &c. Gen. xxiv. 63.

2. In the time of trouble and affliction. Jonah did so. Jonah ii. 7. And God himself expects it. Hos. v. 15. This is a time when we can think more impartially of God, of the things that are above, and of the true interests of our souls. On a bed of sickness, it gives delight and refreshment, strengthens the weak heart, and sweetens the bitterest pains. When the mind is intent upon any object, we forget what we are about; so, when the mind is fixed on God in holy meditation, we sometimes forget for a while both our pain and our sorrow. Let not affliction then drive you from God, but drive you nearer to him.

3. By night on our beds. See pious David. Ps. xlii. 8; lxiii. 6. Paul and Silas, also. Acts xvi. 25. Never should we close our eyes till we have thought upon God. We should endeavour to close our eyes in the love of God, and in peace with him, that our slumbers may be sweet.

III. The happiness arising from such meditations.

This we may say, that it is a work that yields a holy pleasure and delight to a gracious soul. Ps. civ. 34. The nobler the object is, so much more delightful is the meditation of it. There is that in God which fills every desire, and every capacity, and this no earthly thing can do. The mind tires in contemplating other objects; but the more it is employed upon God, the more it loves so to be employed. The soul is insensibly warmed with love to God, while it views him, and runs over his adorable perfections.

Let the sinner go to the world for his comforts, the true Christian will go to God for his. Thus says David. Ps. xciv. 19.

The thoughts of his power establish and strengthen him.

The thoughts of his wisdom resign him to all his providences.

And the thoughts of his eternal love and goodness fill him with triumph in hope and joy.

The more we are with God, the more shall we have of God and of his image in us. Moses came down from the mount with a heavenly brightness on his countenance.

Holy meditation will prepare our hearts for every duty and ordinance.

Finally, it will help us to live above the world, and be a means for fitting us for death and eternity. Apply the subject:

1. In a word of exhortation. O let us be resolved to be of that number in whose thoughts God continually is! In every private retirement, in every closet, in every shade, let God be present with us. Let us count those our best minutes that are spent in nearest converse with God. This is the way to grow in grace, to be preserved from sin, yea, to live in heaven, while our abode is upon earth.

2. A word of reproof. Let sinners be reprov'd, who think with pleasure on other things, but find no time to think on God, on a Saviour, on the word of salvation, on a future state.

And let professing Christians be reprov'd, that they are so backward to this duty, that they perform it so slightly and uncomfortably when they set about it, that a false and transitory world engages so much of their attention, while a Saviour and his love are so much neglected.

WALKING WITH GOD.

And Enoch walked with God, &c.—Gen. v. 24.

It is the design of the word of the Lord to lead mankind to a glorious immortality; and hence it affords not only heavenly instructions and precepts, but proposes the greatest encouragements, and sets before us the noblest examples. In the text, we have one of the most illustrious, and that even in the first ages of the world. Enoch was the seventh generation from the creation of the world: he was a person of the greatest piety: it is here said that he walked with God, &c. in close communion with him, &c. Others are celebrated for their arts, inventions, and buildings; but his praise is, that he walked with God. And it is said, that "he was not," &c. that is, God translated him immediately to heaven. The most honourable mention is made of him in Heb. xi. 5; and Jude, verses 14, 15.

O that we could walk with God, as this illustrious patriarch did! To excite you thereto is my design in addressing you from this text. And,

I. I shall show what is necessary, before we can enter into this course of walking with God.

1. Those who are in a natural state are incapable and unwilling to walk with God. Rom. viii. 7, 8. Some good things may appear in the life of such, but they are far from the life of grace. They must be converted and regenerated, before they can walk with God.

There must be life before there is action: we must first live in the Spirit, before we can walk in the Spirit. Gal. v. 25.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is especially requisite. Col. ii. 6; Heb. xi. 6. Holiness is the fruit of faith; faith receives strength from Christ, and enables us to live to his glory.

Where did you ever see a soul walking with God, in his love and fear, breathing after him, that had not first espoused itself to Jesus Christ?

They that shut out Christ from their religion, will come as far short of the heavenly life as they come short of Christ.

Let us therefore believe in Christ, lay our foundation on him, and so prepare to walk with God.

II. What it is to walk with God.

It is an expression used in scripture to denote a holy course of life. As Enoch, so in after ages Noah is said to have walked with God. Gen. vi. 9. To walk with God, is to lead a life of grace here on earth. It implies,

1. That we walk in love with God. This is a most sublime part of our heavenly life on earth, to live in the love of God: it is often recommended to us in scripture. Matt. xxii. 37. 2 Thess. iii. 5.

Love to God should dwell in our hearts, and appear in all our actions.

It should be our chief joy and comfort, and the enlivening principle from which we act.

Every approach to him should increase our love; every smile of his countenance, every mercy, should blow up the sacred flame.

We should long for the end of time, that we may see him as he is, and dwell for ever in his presence.

It was such a love as this made David say, "Whom have I," &c. Ps. lxxiii. 25. And the church, "the desire," &c. Isa. xxvi. 8.

2. We should walk in reliance upon God.

All our trust and dependence should be continually on him. Ps. xl. 4.

We should rest on his power and goodness; on his providence and promises. To him should we commit ourselves in life, at death, and for ever. 2 Tim. i. 12.

In all afflictions, &c. we should fly to the shadow of his wings for his Almighty protection. Prov. xviii. 10.

David was a shining example of this trust and confidence in God. Ps. xxvii. 1—3. Job xii. 15. And thus the prophet speaks—"Although the fig tree," &c. Hab. iii. 17, 18.

3. We should walk in obedience to God.

We should serve him with a willing and cheerful mind. So far as his will is made known to us, we should submit to it.

When our passions and corruptions rebel against it, we should resist them, and pray against them.

God's will should be our will, and the rule of our life. Thus the apostle exhorts, Rom. xii. 1, 2. The holy Psalmist could say, "Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation," &c. Ps. cxix. 166. Hezekiah, in the prospect of death, could say, "Remember," &c. 2 Kings xx. 3. And that was an excellent resolution of the people. Josh. xxiv. 24.

4. We should walk in communion with God: we should keep a daily converse and intercourse with him: we should still be drawing nigh to him. Heb. x. 22.

To this purpose, we should redeem those hours that others spend in

vanity ; and we should love frequently to retire from the world, that we may meet with God.

Our communion with him should be carried on by his ordinances, by meditation, and by prayer.

Our thoughts should be much with him, continually fixed on his glories, and entertained with them, as David's were. Ps. xciv. 19.

And our prayers should be like holy incense, perpetually ascending to him, as the apostle admonishes. 1 Thess. v. 17.

III. Consider some of the properties of true walking with God. And,

1. It is constant. Constancy is implied in the word walking, as we see in the precept, "Walk in love." Eph. v. 2 ; that is, continue in love, and let it be your daily delight and practice.

Our religion should be regular and uniform, not by fits and starts : we should have the habit of holiness in our souls. What else can these expressions mean in Eph. iii. 17. Gal. vi. 9. Prov. xxiii. 17. xxviii. 14.

This was the character of the primitive Christians, Acts ii. 42 ; ix. 31 ; of Gaius, 3 John 1 ; of Asaph, Ps. lxxiii. 23 ; of Daniel, iv. 10 ; and of David, Ps. lv. 17.

2. It is circumspect. Eph. v. 15.

We should watch against all temptations, that we be not led into sin, and be conscientious in every duty.

We should be as circumspect for God, and in his ways, as men of the world are in consulting their safety, profit, and honour. It was Paul's exercise to preserve a good conscience. Acts xxiv. 16. David prayed, "Hold up my goings," &c. Ps. xvii. 5 ; and hence his pious resolution, Ps. xxxix. 1.

3. It is humble ; and to walk humbly with thy God. Mic. vi. 8. The best of men have always been the most humble : such were Jacob, Job, David, and others.

Humility should accompany every duty : all we do should be ascribed to God and his grace ; and all God's mysteries and providences should be submitted to by us.

IV. Offer some considerations and arguments to excite to a holy walk with God.

1. To walk with God, is the most excellent life : it is to live to the noblest purpose : it answers the end of our creation, by employing our sublime faculties on objects suited to their nature. It is to live above the world, and resembles the life of angels, who are eternally adoring, loving, and serving God. Such are worthy to be remembered and admired, in preference to all others ; and God assures us that they shall be so. Ps. cxii. 6. Prov. x. 7.

2. It is the most pleasant life. It affords the soul many spiritual pleasures, and such as vastly transcend the highest delights of sense : peace, joy, and hope, are the Christian's portion. Rom. xv. 13.

It sweetens all our earthly pleasures, and gives a double enjoyment. Health, food, rest, retirement, &c. are all more sweet to the soul when God is enjoyed with them. The very afflictions of life are sweetened with God, and with his presence. In this case we have light in darkness, joy in sorrow, life in death. Pious David knew the sweets of this holy walk. Ps. iv. 7, 8 ; and Solomon. Prov. iii. 17 ; also the eunuch, Acts viii. 39.

3. To walk with God is absolutely necessary, if we would enjoy him in heaven. Heb. xii. 14. Rev. xxi. 27. Heaven is a most pure and holy state; and if an unholy soul could be admitted there, it would be no heaven to such. Apply the subject, by,

1. Reproving that great decay of practical religion and close walk with God, which is too visible among professing Christians. Some are all for dispute and controversy; others content themselves with as little religion as possible: some are altogether taken up with earthly business and pleasures; and others not only neglect, but cry down strictness of life.

2. Exhorting all Christians to walk more strictly with God. O walk with God! whatever corrupt nature, or a deceitful temper, or a flattering world may say against it. Is nature backward and reluctant? Let grace overcome it. Does Satan defame religion? Love it the better. Does the world present other allurements before you? Turn your eyes from them. All that would draw you nearer to God is your friend, all that would draw you away from him is your enemy.

Consider the example of departed saints, how they walked with God; of Enoch, Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, and follow them.

Think what life will give you most satisfaction when you come to die, and follow it; so shall you at last be able to say with St. Paul, "I have fought the good fight," &c. 2 Tim. iv. 7.

GOD PRESENT WITH HIS PEOPLE IN THE WILDERNESS.

I did know thee, &c.—Hos. xiii. 5.

In exalted, prosperous and happy circumstances, most men will take notice of us: they will worship the rising sun, make their court to the great, and smile where the world smiles; but in trouble and adversity they will slight us, forget us, and retire from us. They are like those flowers that open in the sunshine, but shut up in the shade. Thus Job complains. Job xix. 13, 14. But the gracious and compassionate God does not deal so by us: he is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, born for adversity. "I did know thee," &c.

1. Consider the low and wilderness state of God's people.

1. It refers to their spiritual wants, weaknesses, and troubles.

In their first conviction of sin, and apprehensions of wrath: "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head," &c. Ps. xxxviii. 4. When the gracious God says to them, as to the man in the gospel. Mark ii. 5. Or in these passages: Micah vii. 19. Isa. xlv. 22. Ezek. xxxvii. 26. He felt for Ephraim. Jer. xxxi. 18, 20. For his people. Ezek. xvi. 6, 8.

As in our first convictions, so also in our first beginnings to walk in the ways of the Lord, when we are weak in grace. Zech. iv. 10. Hos. xi. 1, 3. See the Lord's promise. Isa. xl. 29—31. He is peculiarly careful over us in our infant state.

In the temptations we afterwards meet with, he arms us with spiritual armour; and does not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.

In dejections of soul, when our hope is weak and our comforts low ; when we go mourning for want of a clearer evidence of our interest in Christ, the Lord comforts us, 2 Cor. vii. 6 ; Isa. lxi. 3, and invites us to trust in him. Isa. l. 10.

2. In their temporal wants, weaknesses, and troubles, God knows his people, and takes notice of them. In poverty and want he appears in their behalf, and by his providence finds out means for their support. Ps. xxxiv. 6 ; lxxii. 12, 13.

In pain and sickness, he gives them strength and patience, and many a sweet cordial to revive their souls. Ps. xli. 3 ; xxxviii. 9.

In all the dangers of life, he spreads over them the shadow of his wings, to preserve them from the birds of prey. Ps. xxvii. 5. Isa. xxvi. 20.

II. What kind of knowledge or notice it is that God takes of his people in that state.

1. It is with pity and compassion. If no other eye pities, the Lord's does. Ps. ciii. 13. Lam. iii. 22, 23. He sympathises with them. Isa. lxiii. 9. Heb. iv. 15.

2. So as to manifest his love to them : he gladdens their souls with the smiles of their love. Jer. xxxi. 3.

So as to bestow his comforts on them. When other comforts fail, his are highest ; and when they lose their power and relish, his are sweetest. He comforts us, by bringing to our remembrance past mercies—the promises ; by strengthening our hope and faith, enabling us to look forward to eternal glories. Hos. ii. 14. Isa. xlix. 13.

4. He grants his presence to them : they have not their troubles and trials alone, for God is with them. Isa. xliii. 2 ; xli. 10. The pillar of fire, and also that of smoke, that went before the Israelites, were emblems of the Divine presence with his people in affliction.

5. He affords them help, when they are ready to faint and fall. Ps. xviii. 35 ; xlv. 1. Heb. iv. 16. And when the proper time is come, he delivers them out of their affliction. Ps. xviii. 16, 19 ; xl. 2 ; cxii. 7, 8.

II. Lay down the proof and evidence of this.

1. The word of the Lord often declares it. It is full of promises and assurances to this purpose. Ps. l. 15. We are invited to call upon him, not in prosperity, but in trouble. Matt. xi. 28. Isa. xli. 17, 18.

2. God's dealings with his people in all ages further confirm it. And "he is the same yesterday," &c.

How soon did he appear to our first parents after their fall ! and, instead of casting them off for ever, gave them the promise of a Saviour.

He was with Jacob in his journey from Beersheba to Haran. Gen. xxviii. 10—22. And upon his return to meet his offended brother Esau. Gen. xxxii. 10.

He was with Joseph in the dungeon, Gen. xxxix. 21—23. And to what grandeur and honour did God raise him ! Gen. xli. 37—43.

He was with Moses in the bulrushes, and preserved him, and raised him to be the leader and lawgiver to his people Israel.

He was with David, and raised him from the sheepfold to be king in Israel. Ps. lxxviii. 70. He had many particular adversities afterwards, in which God knew him. Ps. xxxi. 7.

The Lord heard Jonah in the depths of the sea, and saved him. Jon. ii.

He saw Hezekiah's tears, he heard his prayer, and restored him. Isa. xxxviii. 1—8.

He knew his ancient Israel when they were few in number, and protected them. Hos. ix. 10. Ps. cv. 12, 14. When they travelled through desolate places; Amos ii. 10; and provided for them; Deut. ii. 7; Ps. cv. 40, 41; and brought them at last to the promised land.

Application :

1. Let us be concerned to have this God for our God; if not, he will trouble us. Ex. iv. 24.

2. When in a wilderness state, let us trust in our God. As he has been with others so he will be with us. Josh. i. 5.

3. Remember God's kindness in appearing for you. Isa. xliii. 18; Deut. x. 15. Good men have always done so. Ps. xlii. 6. God is displeased with those who neglect this. Hos. xiii. 6, 7. Ezek. xvi. 22.

4. Despise not those who are in a wilderness state, but "weep with those that weep," &c.

FERVENCY OF SPIRIT IN THE SERVICE OF GOD.

Fervent in spirit, &c.—Rom. xii. 11.

DEADNESS and lukewarmness in religion are, above all things, to be dreaded: and yet it is to be feared there is too much of it in the Christian world. It is a disposition of mind hateful to God, and dangerous to man. Let us therefore guard against it; and, if it has overtaken us, strive to be delivered from it, and be "fervent in spirit," &c. Consider,

I. What that fervency of spirit is with which we should serve the Lord.

It is a lively forwardness in the Christian work: it is having the heart in the work, the soul in the service, like Paul. Rom. i. 9.

It is an exerting ourselves for the glory of God. Rom. i. 15.

It is a wakeful vigilance in the ways of the Lord. 1 Thess. v. 6. 1 Pet. v. 8. But, to be more particular here, I would observe,

1. That to be fervent in our spirit, serving the Lord, we must be fervent in our affections—in our desires, panting after God. Ps. xlii. 1, 2; cxix. 136. Isa. xxvi. 8, 9. In our spiritual joy: not earthly, 1 Cor. vii. 30, but spiritual from his promises, a sense of his love, and hope of glory. Matt. v. 12. In our sorrow for sin, and want of sensible comfort. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12. Ps. xxxviii. 17, 18.

2. Fervent in our graces. In our faith: overcoming temptations, the world, death; realizing the glories of eternity. Rom. iv. 20. In our hope; to comfort us in trouble and difficulty. 1 Pet. i. 3. In our love; loving God with all our heart, saying, with David, "Whom have I," &c. Ps. lxxiii. 25. The more we love him, the better able shall we be to serve him, and suffer for him, and the more willing to die to be with him.

3. Fervent in duties; in our prayers, like Hannah. "pouring out the

heart to God." Or like Elijah. James v. 17. Or Jacob. Gen. xxxii. 26; James v. 16. In our praises. Ps. ix. 1; lxiii. 3. In hearing the word. The word was the joy of David's heart; and the Bereans "received it with all readiness of mind." If we heard more fervently, we should hear more profitably: so, also, should we be fervent in the duties we perform to men. 2 Cor. ix. 2. 1 Tim. vi. 18. Col. iii. 23. We should be fervent also in striving after their spiritual and eternal good, and to exercise our every talent in this way.

II. Propose some considerations, to excite us to this fervency in spirit in serving the Lord.

1. The fervent spirit which others have discovered in the service of the Lord. What a fervent spirit was in Elijah, in Moses, in David, in Paul! and how many have loved him even to death, and laid down their lives for him! How laborious have others been in spreading his glory, in the enlargement of his kingdom in the world! We have only here to name a Brainard, a Schwartz, a Wesley, and a Whitefield, and a Coke, names that will be in everlasting remembrance.

2. The consideration of who it is that we serve, God. John iv. 24. He is a glorious Spirit, the Being of beings, infinite, eternal, the maker and upholder of all things, whose glory is above the heavens, whom angels adore, serve, and love. 1 Chron. xvi. 25.

3. The love of Christ, which was matchless, strong and fervent, even to death. What greater inducement can we have? It should put life into our prayers, praises, and every duty. 2 Cor. v. 14.

4. If we consider the future reward annexed to this service. We shall be well recompensed, at the resurrection of the just, with eternal life, perfect happiness, the enjoyment of God the chief good, the being with Christ, beholding his glory. Col. iii. 24. 1 Pet. v. 4. 2 Pet. iii. 14.

5. If we consider how God is served in the upper world by the blessed spirits there. That assembly serves the Lord with unwearied pleasure, with everlasting delight. Rev. vii. 15. Ps. ciii. 20.

Improvement:

1. Let such stand reproved, who are cold and remiss in the service of the Lord. There are but too many such, of whom God complains. Hos. vii. 14. Isa. xxix. 13. They are soon weary of his service. Amos viii. 5. Mal. i. 13. Some were once fervent, but are fallen. Gal. v. 7. Such a spirit renders the service of God unprofitable. Jer. xlviii. 10.

2. Let those who are fervent, increase in that holy fervency, and with a view to it, be much in prayer. Ps. cxix. 33—40. Attend the word; converse with those who are the most fervent. This has a good effect. Ps. cxix. 63. Prov. xiii. 20.

THE GLORY OF GOD

THE CONSTANT END OF THE CHRISTIAN.

Whether therefore ye eat, &c.—1 Cor. x. 31.

OUR actions are not to be judged merely in themselves, but with reference to the end to which they have been directed. A good action, accom-

panied by a bad design, loses much of its value. The noblest end that we can propose to ourselves in acting, is the glory of God. "Whether therefore," &c. In speaking from these words I shall,

I. Show how we should glorify God in all things, and upon all occasions.

1. In all our searches after knowledge, we should search the scriptures, to attain to higher thoughts of God, live to his honour, and bring glory to him. Ps. cxix. 27, 171.

2. In all our spiritual duties, in our prayers. The pharisees sought the praise of men, but we must seek the glory of God. See our Saviour. John xii. 28. In our praises. We should do it to the glory of God. Ps. lxxxvi. 12. In hearing the word, which ought not to be from novelty, or vain curiosity, but to God's glory. Acts xxi. 20; xi. 18. In our works of righteousness. Matt. v. 16. Phil. i. 11. In works of charity. All must be done to the glory of God.

3. In all our spiritual blessings: see the apostle's example. Eph. i. 3. If grace is planted in us, he should have the glory. Isa. lxi. 3. If the heart is changed, it must be ascribed to God. 1 Cor. xv. 10. Also, if we are in a pardoned and justified state. Eph. i. 6. If we have a hope of future happiness. 1 Pet. i. 3.

4. In all our sufferings and afflictions we should glorify his wisdom, faithfulness, justice, lenity, and mercy. Thus David, Ps. cxix. 75; Lam. iii. 31, 32; and Ezra ix. 13. And we must thus glorify God by our faith, trust, patience, resignation, courage, and firmness of mind.

5. In our secret thoughts, God should be uppermost there. Our meditations of him should be frequent, that we may say, "I am continually with thee."

6. In our words and speech. David says, "I will praise him with my glory;" that is, his tongue. Jam. iii. 9. Eph. v. 4.

7. In our deeds and actions: God must be owned in all we do. Jam. iv. 13, 15. Thankfulness to God should accompany all our actions. Col. iii. 17. All our gifts should be exercised with a view to his glory. 1 Pet. iv. 10, 11.

8. In all our outward enjoyments: we should receive them as coming from him, and bless him for them. When help comes from others, we must acknowledge his hand therein, and so glorify him. 2 Cor. ix. 13.

II. Make use of some arguments to recommend and enforce this important duty. And,

1. That we are, and exist, is owing to the goodness of God. Ps. c. 3. We are his offspring. Acts xvii. 28. Hence we should praise and glorify him. Ps. cxlix. 1, 2. Isa. xliii. 7.

2. God has a right and a property in us; we are his, and not our own. 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. He created and redeemed us by his son Jesus Christ. The body is for the Lord. 1 Cor. vi. 13. None of us liveth to himself. Rom. xiv. 7. See the example of Paul. Acts xxvii. 23. David. Ps. c. 3, 4.

3. All our blessings come from God. 1 Cor. iv. 7. Jam. i. 17. He gave us a new heart. Jam. i. 18. Eph. ii. 10. Received us into his family. 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. He made us his people. Hos. ii. 23. Pardoned, justified, adopted, and comforted us. Thus are all our springs in God.

4. All things that we are concerned in, or are conversant with, show forth his glory. His word. Eph. iii. 4, 5. The admirable frame of nature. Ps. viii. 3. His works of providence, by which he preserves nature's laws, provides for an almost innumerable multitude of creatures, restrains the fury of the wicked, and maintains the lot of the just.

5. God requires it of us. This is evident in many places of his word. Lev. x. 3. Ps. xxii. 23. We are exhorted to glorify God, as what is due to him. Ps. xxix. 2. And he is displeased when it is given to others. Isa. xlii. 8. Mal. ii. 2.

6. It sweetens our mercies. When we give God his due, we best secure our own comfort. It is then we can say of any mercy, that we have God with it, and enjoy him in it. Then Solomon's rule holds good. Eccl. ix. 7.

7. The glorifying God is the work of the blessed spirits above. Angels, and saints made perfect, are still praising God. Their eternity is spent in it. Their happiness in heaven consists in it. Rev. xv. 3, 4. And can we do better than imitate the work above, and join in that glorious concert? I shall now apply the subject. And,

1. Let me reprove those that aim at other things, and not at the glory of God. There are too many of this description. Out of ten lepers cleansed, only one gave God the praise of it. Men seek their own pleasure, Luke xii. 19; 2 Tim. iii. 4, their own glory; but God often blasts their enterprises, as in the case of Herod, &c. Acts xii. 23. Rom. i. 21, 28.

2. Let me exhort Christians to glorify God in all their ways. Let the text be present to their minds on all occasions. O let him therefore have the praise of all that we have, and of all that we are! Let us lay ourselves in the dust that he may be exalted! so may we expect to glorify him eternally with all the mighty hosts and innumerable choir of angels and saints made perfect.

TRUTH AND LOVE AN AMIABLE UNION.

Speaking the truth in love.—Eph. iv. 15.

THE apostle begins the chapter, in which the text lies, with beseeching Christians to "walk worthy of their holy calling," &c. Verses 1, 2. He then exhorts to unity. Verses 3—6. And guards them against wavering and instability in their principles; verse 14; and then exhorts them, in the text, to speak the truth, but to speak it in love. "Speaking the truth in love."

I. I shall show that we ought to have a sincere and steady regard to the truth of the gospel. We are here exhorted to speak the truth. However men may despise it, or speak against it, or however it may displease them, or cross our own interests, we are to buy it and sell it not. Prov. xxiii. 23. But to be more particular.

1. We should have a steady regard to truth, because we are so frequently admonished to it by God. 2 Pet. iii. 17. Tit. i. 9. Phil. i. 27. Of this faith, some made shipwreck. 1 Tim. i. 19, 20. 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18. Also Demas. 2 Tim. iv. 10.

2. Because Christ revealed it to us. Heb. i. 1—3. He committed the truth to us, unveiled with types and shadows. 1 John v. 20. His name is inscribed on it. Col. iii. 16.

3. Because of what it cost our ancestors, what pains they have taken to transmit it down to us; and many of them have laid down their lives in confirmation of the truth.

4. Because of the deplorable condition of those who have lost it; how poor, wavering, and unsettled their condition; they have no true satisfaction, and are a prey to every snare. 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11.

5. Because of its high intrinsic value: it is much more precious than gold, yea, than much fine gold, and was to David sweeter than honey and the honey-comb. It is the light of life, that guides souls to God, to salvation, to glory.

6. For the sake of those that come after us. It is a trust committed to us for the rising generation, and what better legacy can we leave them? The Israelites were to instruct their children, &c. Ps. lxxviii. 4—6.

7. Because of the great influence it has upon practice. A blind eye makes a stumbling foot: bad principles generally produce a bad life. Its happy effects upon the Col. i. 6. It frees us from the bondage of sin. John viii. 32. The apostle connects holiness of life with it. 2 Thess. ii. 13.

8. Because of the great influence it has upon our comfort. When we depart from the truth, we are like a ship without a compass, a traveller that has lost his way. It produces uncertainty, disquietude, and misery. Paul died happy, having kept the faith. 2 Tim. iv. 7.

II. That our regard to truth should be accompanied with love; we are to speak the truth in love.

But when may we be said to speak the truth in love?

1. When, notwithstanding our esteem for the truth, we avoid hot disputes about it. He who is always disputing about the truth, it is feared will hardly find time to practise it. Truth may be defended with calmness and moderation at proper seasons; but all heat and passion ought carefully to be avoided. 2 Tim. ii. 25. Tit. iii. 9. Phil. ii. 14. Eph. iv. 31.

2. When we are not uncharitable and censorious to them who differ from us. We must agree to disagree, especially in matters of minor importance, and not pronounce anathemas against them. Matt. vii. 1.

3. When we abominate all persecution. A persecuting spirit is altogether antichristian; we should never, therefore, persecute any one, whatever their religious sentiments may be. We have no right to do so: truth needs it not.

4. When we make a kind and loving use of our knowledge of the truth, endeavouring to enlighten the minds of men. Eph. vi. 19. To warn and admonish them against sin. 2 Cor. v. 11. To desire their salvation. Rom. x. 1. To comfort them. 1 Thess. v. 11. 2 Cor. i. 4.

But why should we thus speak the truth in love?

1. Because truth looks more amiable when dressed in love. It is an excellent thing in itself, but appears much to advantage when lodged in a soul that is adorned with humanity and goodness. The apple of gold is then set in a picture of silver; but austerity and uncharitableness deface and deform the beautiful truths of the gospel.

2. Because it is more useful. The mind cannot be forced, but it may be won. A charitable, kind, compassionate Christian will do more good in the world, with a little knowledge, than another can with a deal of it, when it is lodged in a sour, uncharitable disposition, and in a narrow, ungenerous soul.

I now come to the application ; and here,

1. I would exhort you to dig for the truths of the gospel, as for treasures of gold. Search for it diligently and conscientiously, and pray that God would make it known to you ; so shall you increase in the knowledge of truth. Hos. vi. 3. 2 Tim. iii. 14.

2. I would exhort you to hold the truth in love. Let a sound judgment dwell in a kind and loving heart. Let the truth sweeten, not imbitter your dispositions. Truth and love are united. 2 Tim. i. 7. And without love we are nothing.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD, THE SAFETY AND COMFORT OF HIS PEOPLE.

And he said, My presence, &c.—Ex. xxxiii. 14.

THESE words contain an answer to the prayer of Moses. His meek spirit was grieved with the conduct of Israel at Horeb, where they made the golden calf, and worshipped it. God's anger waxed hot against them ; and, but for the intercession of Moses, would have consumed them : he threatened, however, to forsake them, and withdraw the symbols of his presence from them. This deeply affected Moses, which led him to pray, as he here does in this and the preceding chapter. The text is an answer to his prayer, "My presence," &c.

This promise, given to the church in the wilderness, is equally applicable to the heirs of salvation at all times. And hence I shall consider,

1. What we are to understand by God's presence promised here, and so much desired by his people. And I would observe,

1. That with regard to the Divine immensity, God is every where. Ps. cxxxix. 8, 9. This presence is common to all his creatures : it supports them in being, superintends and disposes of them as he pleases.

2. There is a more special presence of God, known only to his church. Thus was he with Israel of old, going before them in a pillar of cloud by day, &c. Ex. xiii. 21. In after ages, in the temple at Jerusalem, 2 Kings xix. 15 ; and filled it with his glory. Agreeably to this, he is still in the New Testament church, and will be to the end of time. The ordinances are the signs of his gracious presence, and the means of salvation ; these are the river, &c. Ps. xli. 4, 5.

3. There is yet a more special presence of God, peculiar to the saints only, in the operations of his grace and Spirit. This David prayed for. Ps. li. 11. God is in the sanctified soul, as in his holy temple ; that is his habitation ; he hath desired it, and there he delights to dwell. 1 Cor. iii. 16.

This was the Redeemer's comprehensive promise ; which, although

made to his disciples, is common to all saints. John xiv. 16, 17. To cleanse from moral impurity, promote their sanctification, attest their adoption, seal on their hearts the promises, and to be the pledge and first-fruits of the glory yet to be revealed.

II. To what purpose this presence of God is promised and given to his people.

1. To be their monitor and guide. How necessary is this ! It is not in man to direct his steps. For this Moses prayed ; ver. 13 ; and God has promised it. Ps. xxv. 9. Hence also David's prayer, Ps. cxliii. 10. And Asaph's pious reflections, Ps. lxxiii. 23, 24.

2. Not only to guide them in the way, but to enable them to walk in it. He strengthens them with might in the inner man. "To them that have no might he increaseth strength." Isa. xl. 29—31.

3. To protect and defend them. He is not only their sun to shine upon their way, but their shield to protect them in it. Gen. xvii. 1. He made this promise good to Jacob, when meeting his armed and enraged brother ; to Joseph, in prison ; to his chosen people, at the Red Sea ; to David, when hunted for his life ; to Jeremiah, in the dungeon ; to Peter, in gaol ; and thousands more, of whom the world was not worthy : and, blessed be God, he is still the same.

4. To give them rest : so says the text.

As it respected Israel, it meant a quiet settlement in the land of Canaan ; but especially a rest in heaven, of which Canaan was a figure.

There is a rest in this life, which the true believer enjoys, consisting of a blessed tranquillity of mind, arising from a sense of pardon, justification, adoption, peace with God, joy in the Holy Ghost, and the hope of glory. Heb. iv. 3. But the promise holds out to the Christian a future rest in heaven, which consists,

1. In a perfect deliverance from sin, and all vexation arising from it, all temptation to it. Rev. i. 5, 6.

2. For a complete deliverance from all the afflicting evils of time ; and their name is legion, for they are many. This is the world where darkness, disease, and death reign ; where life is an ill, which only death can cure ; and this will do it effectually. Rev. xiv. 13. The grave is the burying-place of the body ; it is also the sepulchre of their sorrows. Rev. vii. 16, 17.

3. It is a rest to the soul beyond the grave ; owing to the completions of its desires in God, as its ever-satisfying good and portion. He himself is their reward ; and if he is happy, so must they. Their rest is eternal, fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore, without intermission, decay, or end. Their sun shall go no more down : the Lord is their everlasting light, and their God their glory. Rev. xxii. 4, 5.

It remains to make a few reflections.

1. Let this instance of the efficacy of prayer, in my text, powerfully engage you to the love and practice of it. What wonders has it done ! Brought down blessings of every kind ; opened the windows of heaven, and the barren womb ; stopped the sun in his course ; the moon to stand still ; brought the dead to life, literally ; and some from the belly of hell, as Jonah says, ii. 1, 2.

2. Happy they who have this promised presence ! But as for me, will

one say, I am cast out of his sight ; I remember God, and am troubled. Is his mercy clean gone? Be not discouraged ; wait upon the Lord, and do not weary. He dispenses his favours freely, and in due seasons. Blessed are they that wait upon him. Heb. x. 37.

3. See that ye walk worthy of this great Presence that goes with you, and delight yourselves in it. O beware of every thing irreverent and disrespectful of his holiness and majesty ! Walk always as in his sight, and he will be with you through life, attend you in death, and take you to glory. Ps. xxiii. 6.

CONSTANCY IN FAITH AND HOLINESS,

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY AND CROWN.

And exhorted them all, &c.—Acts xi. 23.

PERSECUTION raging hot after the death of Stephen, the disciples were scattered abroad, and went every where preaching the word. At Antioch, a populous city, and metropolis of Syria, an effectual door was opened, and the graces of Christ gloriously triumphed. Barnabas was despatched from Jerusalem to establish these young converts, “and exhorted them all,” &c.

In which words we may consider,

I. The import of this exhortation, or duty of cleaving to the Lord.

It may be necessary just to premise, that our cleaving to the Lord necessarily implies, that we know God, and love him, and are thus joined to him ; for the soul does not live in any thing so much as that which it loves and delights in. Having made this general remark, I go on to observe,

1. That this exhortation is complied with, when we adhere to his truths, to all the doctrines of his holy word, having received them in love, and upon the footing of divine testimony, we must be steadfast in the faith.

2. It consists in adhering to the positive institutions of Jesus Christ, attending to all the means of grace. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, nor mixing the devices of men with the commandments of God. To these things the apostle refers. 1 Cor. xi. 2.

3. It consists, farther, in an inviolable attachment, in love and obedience to the great rule of life, the holy law of God. David loved the law of God above gold, yea, above much fine gold ; and the beloved disciple declares his commands not to be grievous. 1 John v. 3.

4. It implies a strong attachment to his people and interest in the world : openly espousing the one, and avowing our relation to, and dear connexions with the other. Acts ii. 42. Preferring the increase and flourishing of Christ's kingdom, to their chief earthly joys. Ps. cxxxvii. 5, 6.

5. That we are to cleave to the example of Christ. That example is a mirror of all moral excellence and perfection ; and it is exhibited that we may tread in his steps : we are to have the same mind, and like

him, to be often and fervently in prayer ; kindly affected, and unwearied in doing good to men ; to be meek and humble, patient under abuse from the world, and submissive under sufferings from the hand of God ; dead to the alluring enjoyments of earth, heavenly in our conversation, &c. I come now to consider,

II. The particular quality of this comprehensive duty of cleaving to the Lord, namely, with purpose of heart, which implies,

1. That our entering into the service of the Lord is the result of counsel ; and, after mature and serious thoughts, our deliberate choice. Thus, having weighed matters well, and counted the cost, to choose the better part. Hasty resolves are seldom steady : they are like the morning cloud, and early dew, that soon passeth away : hence the short-lived vows, in time of danger, or in the near prospect of death.

2. That we are firm and constant in our well-chosen course. The heart must not be divided between God and the world ; lest, instead of persevering, we be unsteadfast and perfidious. Matt. vi. 24.

It is such a purpose that will make us deaf to the solicitations of the flesh, blind to the alluring smiles, and unmoved by frowns or sufferings from the world ; replying to all these, as Ruth did to her mother-in-law, Ruth i. 16.

3. And this purpose of heart is ever followed with performance : it is an active principle, and will exert itself in the exercise of those things which will contribute to our cleaving to the Lord : such as self-examination, watching the heart, and against temptations from without, denying ourselves, dying to the world, looking often to Jesus, living by faith, dwelling in love to him, &c. "For if we do these things, we shall never fall." 2 Pet. i. 10.

A few reflections shall conclude this subject :

1. From what has been said we may see, that however great the spiritual attainments of any people may be, it does not supersede the necessity of the gospel ministry. No doubt many of the Christians at Antioch had received largely of the grace of God, and yet we here find an eminent minister sent to labour among them, and exhort them to cleave unto the Lord.

2. We see the occasion of backsliding in many. They grow remiss in duty, neglect the means of grace, follow Christ at a distance, and fall back into the world again. O guard against relapsing into a course, in which God's soul will have no pleasure in you ! in which the Redeemer's heart will be grieved with the hardness and perfidy of yours. A course the end of which is perdition, perdition deep and double. Stand fast, therefore ; quit you like men ; be strong. And in order to this, take the following directions :

1. Grow in acquaintance with Jesus Christ, his word and testimony, and the mystery of redemption through him. An ignorant Christian will not be a sound and steadfast one.

2. See that ye be possessed of the love of the truth, and that the great things revealed in the gospel be held in high estimation.

3. From your experience of this world, its troubles, emptiness, and vanity, consider it as the place of your banishment, not as your home, and sit loose in your affections to it.

4. Stand in awe, and sin not ; set God always before you, so shall he be ever at your right hand, and you shall not be greatly moved.

5. Often recall your engagements to the Lord, and his promises to you. Frequently renew the one ; plead and put him in remembrance of the other. Be not high-minded, but fear. Peter's confidence paved the way for his downfall. Let the Lord often hear you, in the language of the church. Ps. lxxx. 17, 18.

THE CHRISTIAN REJOICING IN TRIBULATION.

Beloved, think it not strange, &c.—1 Pet. iv. 12, 13.

THIS epistle is a general epistle ; it is not directed to any individual, or any particular church, but to a number of Christians called strangers. Chap. i. 1. It appears they had suffered much already for the sake of Christ ; had been scattered and driven from house and home, for the sake of religion : and the apostle clearly enough intimates in the text, that some greater trial still awaited them. “Beloved, think it not strange,” &c. I shall,

1. Consider the particulars of their character, as here laid down in this epistle.

1. They had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, chap. i. 25, preached, no doubt, by the apostles themselves ; and had heard to good effect ; had felt its awakening and regenerating power. 1 Thess. i. 5.

2. They had obeyed the truth, chap. i. ver. 22, and received Christ by faith, as the Son of God, the true Messiah ; their Saviour and Redeemer, yet believing. Ver. 8.

3. Were born again, and brought into the family of God : made the heirs of a glorious immortality. Ver. 23.

4. Hence their love to Jesus Christ, whom they had never seen, but heard of and loved. Ver. 8.

5. Their hope of the heavenly inheritance, which was lively and strong. Verses 3, 4.

6. Their joy in the Lord, which was unspeakable and full of glory. Ver. 8.

In our text they are called beloved ; for however much they may be undervalued, and despised by the world, they are dear to all who know how to form a proper estimate of their character. They are dear,

1. To the eternal Father, who hath pardoned, accepted, adopted, and sanctified them ; they are his portion, his jewels, with whom he takes his pleasant walks, and with whom he delights to dwell. Deut. xxxii. 9.

2. To the Lord Jesus, who died for them, lives for them, pleading their cause, preparing mansions for them, and will come to receive them. John xiv. 2, 3.

3. To the Holy Ghost, who enlightened and awakened them, and comforts ; witnesses to their adoption, and seals them to the day of redemption. Eph. iv. 30.

4. To the holy angels, who rejoiced at their conversion, who minister to them, protect them, and will at last conduct them to glory. Luke xvi. 22.

5. To the saints in heaven, those especially who knew them upon earth; who remember and love them still; and indeed to all of them who are waiting in pleasing hope that God will shortly accomplish the number of his elect, that they may dwell together for ever.

6. To the saints on earth, that as they are all one family, there is not only a family likeness, but a family liking; they love one another with pure hearts fervently. 1 John iii. 14.

II. That such characters are subject to trials, fiery trials, which are sent to try them. They are tried,

1. By personal affliction, pain, sickness, and disease. See Job.

2. By temptation. Satan is called the tempter, because he tempts to sin. As such he is wise, malicious, diligent, and powerful. 1 Pet. v. 8.

3. By persecution from the world, from unconverted relations, and often from half-hearted Christians; from Roman Catholics, and others who differ from us in their views of truth; and this is what is particularly alluded to in the text. 2 Tim. iii. 12.

But there are different kinds and degrees of persecution.

1. The being reproached; 1 Pet. iv. 14; reviled, and all manner of evil said of us falsely; Matt. v. 11; which is one of the lowest species of persecution.

2. The being injured in our property, either by having the usual sources of supply dried up, or deprived of what we possess by violence, called the spoiling of our goods. Heb. x. 34.

3. The being deprived of liberty and life, which is the most that men can do: they can only kill the body. Matt. x. 28.

These are called fiery trials.

1. Inasmuch as they occasion pain to the mind, as fire to the body, "no affliction for the present being joyous," &c. Heb. xii. 11. And,

2. As they are of a purifying nature, separating the dross from the pure metal, and giving the soul a brighter polish for the kingdom of God. And,

3. They are permitted to come upon us, to try us, to try our piety, sincerity, faith, hope, love, stability, constancy, &c. and if upon the trial we stand, the trial of our faith is much more precious than that of gold, 1 Pet. i. 7, yielding more abundant satisfaction than all the treasures of this earth can afford.

III. The temper and disposition of mind with which we are to receive these trials; we must not think it strange, or be offended thereat, as if some strange thing happened to us. For,

1. Our Lord has forewarned us of these things. John xvi. 33. Matt. x. 16—22.

2. Our Lord himself suffered in the same way; he was reproached, reviled, and persecuted, even to death. John xv. 20.

3. It has been the lot of all the saints from the beginning: Abel, Noah, Moses, David, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, yea, all the prophets, Acts vii. 52, the apostles, primitive saints. Acts viii. 3. Heb. xi. 36—38. What streams of Christian blood flowed while Rome was pagan, and not less

so since she was Christian ! the Pope and his creatures having drunk deep of the blood of God's saints. Rev. xvi. 6. And that she does not do so now, is not for want of inclination, but of power : hence the Pope's bulls against the Bible Society and the spread of knowledge through the world. If ever they are admitted into power again, woe be to the church of God ! Happy day when she shall fall to rise no more. Rev. xiv. 8.

We must expect it in the nature of things ; nature and grace are opposites, and those who are born of the flesh, will persecute those who are born of the Spirit. Gal. iv. 29. John xv. 19. 2 Tim. iii. 12.

We are to rejoice, &c. Suffering Christians partake of the sufferings of Christ,

1. When they suffer for the sake of the truth of Christ, and their adherence to it.

2. When they suffer for his sake, because of their attachment to him and to his people, because they serve him, and live to his glory.

3. Jesus Christ considers their sufferings as his own. The church is his body, of which he is the head. Col. i. 18. And whatever is done to them, he regards as done to himself. Matt. xxv. 45.

4. They are to rejoice, not because men are so wicked as to make them suffer ; no, here they should weep, for their case is dreadful ; but because they are counted worthy to suffer for Christ. Acts v. 41. Hence the primitive saints coveted martyrdom as the highest honour they could receive.

They are to rejoice also in hope of the glory that is to be revealed. This refers to the second coming of Christ, called his appearing. 1 Pet. i. 7. Col. iii. 4. 2 Thess. i. 7. Then shall be revealed,

1. His essential glory, as God ; his wisdom, in his perfect knowledge of all his creatures, their thoughts, words, and actions ; his purity, in rewarding virtue and punishing vice ; his truth, in fulfilling his promises and executing his threatenings ; his goodness, in bestowing heaven upon the righteous ; his power, in punishing the wicked ; his justice, in the equity of his rewards and punishments, according to their works.

2. The glory of his person, clothed with light as with a garment, shining brighter than ten thousand suns ; some rays of which appeared at his transfiguration, and at the conversion of Saul. Acts ix. 3.

3. The glory of his mediatorial character, in its effects on angels and saints, all of whom shall appear with him, and all glorious ; in whom he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied. Isa. liii. 11.

And this glory shall be revealed,

1. In the presence of wicked men. It will terrify and distract them, confound and overwhelm them ; it will fill them with horror and despair. Rev. vi. 15—17. There will be no way of escape.

2. In the presence of devils. They shall be there to receive their dreadful doom. Matt. xxv. 41.

3. In the presence of angels, 2 Thess. i. 7, who will accede to the decisions of that awful day. Rev. xvi. 5, 6.

4. In the presence of the saints : they shall all be there, shall be glad, and glad "with exceeding joy," which will know no interruption, no end.

To conclude :

1. We may here see the happiness of those who suffer with Christ; they shall reign with him in glory. 2 Tim. ii. 12.

2. We may here see the folly and misery of those who oppose themselves to God and to his people. He will be more than a match for them. They are reserved for destruction. Job xxi. 30. They shall be silent in darkness, 1 Sam. ii. 9, while the sound of their misery shall be heard in weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. And here we may see,

3. Who shall have the best of it at last: the persecuted, oppressed saints, or those who persecuted and oppressed them. As to the righteous, they shall inherit glory; but as to the wicked, the end of these things is death.

GOD WITH US.

And who is he that will harm you, &c.—1 Pet. iii. 13.

THIS is the language of St. Peter. It contains a holy triumph over all the enemies of the children of God, who may cause them to suffer for the sake of righteousness. Verse 14. In the context, unity, love, and compassion, are enjoined; rendering evil for evil, and railing, forbidden; and blessing in their stead commanded. Christ has set them an example of meekness, patience, mercy, and charity; which, if they followed, St. Peter declares none should be able to harm them.

In speaking from this passage, I shall show you that good men have many things to secure and protect them from harm.

I. God's all-seeing providence.

It is impossible that any thing can be so secretly contrived, but that he sees and knows it. Ps. cxxi. 4. A sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice.

Good men are more under the eye of Divine Providence than others are. Prov. x. 3. Isa. iii. 10. Gen. vi. 8, 9. God would not drown the world till Noah was safe in the ark.

The two angels could not destroy Sodom till Lot was gone out of it. Gen. xix. 22.

Such is his care over good men, that had there been ten such in Sodom, he would not have destroyed it. Gen. xviii. 32.

Many are the miracles which God has wrought for the preservation of good men. He preserved Shadrach, &c. in the midst of the flames. Dan. iii. When the knife was at Isaac's throat, he sent an angel to stop the fatal deed. Gen. xxii. 11, 12. He preserved Moses in his infancy. Ex. ii. Daniel in the lions' den. Dan. vi. Joseph in the pit. Gen. xxxvii. St. Paul in many perils. 2 Cor. xi. And St. Peter in prison. Acts xii.

II. His Almighty power, which overrules all events. The assurance of this made the three Hebrew children condemn the threats of Nebuchadnezzar. Dan. iii. 17.

And our Saviour uses the same argument, to prove that his sheep shall never perish. John x. 28, 29. Fear not, Abraham. Gen. xv. 1. And on this great power he built his faith. Also David. 2 Sam. xxii. 2, 3. His hand is omnipotent, he spans the heavens. Isa. xl. 12. On this almighty arm all good men may trust. Ps. xxvii. 1.

III. His promise, that he will give his angels charge over them.

I will not dispute the point, whether every man has his good or bad angel: thus much, however, is certain, that they were sent as a guard about Elisha. 2 Kings vi. 17. It was an angel that was sent to bring Lot out of Sodom, Gen. xix. 1. Peter out of prison. Acts xii. 11. They encamp about them that fear God, Ps. xxxiv. 7, and are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation. Heb. i. 14.

But, as Heraclitus said, "If it was not for the sun, it would be night for all the stars;" so, if God's countenance did not shine on the righteous, they could derive but little comfort from the guard of angels.

They are the servants of God: they attend him, and do nothing without his command.

IV. Nothing, either from within or from without, can harm good men.

Nothing from within. Good men are sure of peace here, and glory hereafter. Peace of conscience is a brazen wall against the malice of men, the sting of death, and the fiery darts of Satan. Prov. xxviii. 1. Rom. viii. 33, 34.

They are secure from that which is without. Prov. xvi. 7. Sometimes God strikes terror into their enemies, so that they dare not molest them. Gen. xxxv. 5. Jacob prayed to be delivered from the hand of his brother Esau. Gen. xxxii. 11. See the event. Gen. xxxiii. 4. God promises to defend the Israelites. Ex. xxxiv. 24.

But suppose the malice of man to continue against good men, God can curse their very weapons. Isa. liv. 16, 17.

The beasts of the field, &c. are at peace with good men. Hos. ii. 18.

O the happy and secure state that good men are in! Ps. xxxvii. 37—40.

V. It is necessary that in times of danger, means should be used in order to our safety and preservation. Who will blame Jacob for flying from his angry brother? Gen. xxvii. 43. Or Moses, for flying from Pharaoh? Ex. ii. 15. Or David, when he withdrew from Saul's presence? 1 Sam. xix. 10. Or Elijah, when he hid himself from the rage of Jezebel? 1 Kings xvii. 3. Or the children of the prophets, when they took sanctuary in the cave from the fury of the idolatrous queen? 1 Kings xviii. 13. Or Peter, for going out from prison, the angel having prepared his way? Acts xii. 9.

Paul, though willing to die for Christ, would not expose himself to the enraged multitude. Acts xix. 31. And again, in Acts xxiii. 21, our blessed Saviour himself did so, Matt. xii. 15, and taught his disciples to do so also. Matt. x. 23.

We ought not to be prodigal of our lives; not to run against the point of a sword, or upon the mouth of a cannon, when it is in our power to step aside, and prevent being killed. God will not always use his almighty arm. He could have protected the wise men in their return, Matt. ii, but he advised them to decline the danger, by going another way.

He could have commanded legions of angels to have guarded the infancy of Christ, but he chose rather to send an angel to Joseph, to bid him flee into Egypt with the young child. Matt. ii. 13.

We need not be afraid of failing in our duty to God, in using means to prolong our life and lengthen our days. Hezekiah used means for his recovery. Isa. xxxviii. 21.

The security of good men, however, does not consist in an entire exemption from troubles, but in a preservation in them, and a deliverance out of them. Ps. xxxiv. 19. And although wicked men may sometimes kill the body, yet they cannot harm the soul. It is here the Christian triumphs. Rom. viii. 35.

O the invaluable benefit of a holy life ! They, of all men, are secure from danger. God will either protect them from danger, preserve them in it, support them under it, or at last give them a happy issue out of it.

Thus shall good men be blessed : happy in this world, and in that which is to come. Heaven shall be their reward ; happy saints and angels their companions, with whom they shall spend a glorious eternity, in praising and adoring their Lord and Saviour. Lastly, it only remains that we are all followers of that which is good at all times, but especially in dangerous times. A holy and religious life will bring down God's blessing upon us. Rom. viii. 28.

Let us trust our concerns with God ; commit our bodies, souls, effects, friends, and relations, to his care and protection ; and, although we cannot see him with our bodily eyes, yet he is near to every one of us. Acts xvii. 28.

Let us make peace with God, on account of our sins, and be at peace one with another, and then the God of peace will delight to dwell among us. And who shall harm us, if we be followers of that which is good ?

THE HAPPINESS OF HAVING THE LORD FOR OUR GOD.

Happy is that people, &c.—Ps. cxliv. 15.

THERE is nothing in the world so much talked of, and less understood, than the business of a happy life. All are in pursuit of happiness. The worldling looks for it in riches ; the philosopher in knowledge ; the ambitious man in honours ; the voluptuous man in pleasures : but they are all disappointed. These can never suit their wants, or satisfy the vast desires of an immortal soul. Real Christians are the only wise persons in the world : these seek happiness where indeed it is to be found, in the enjoyment of God, the centre of bliss. So says the text : "Happy," &c. Inquire,

I. What it is to have the Lord for our God ; and it implies,

1. Reconciliation and friendship with God. Mankind are naturally at enmity with God : but, upon our repentance for sin, and faith in Jesus Christ, the enmity of our nature is slain, we are reconciled to God, his anger is turned away, and he comforts us. Isa. xii. 1.

2. A near relation betwixt God and us. He is our Father, to adopt, pity, provide, and bequeath to us an inheritance ; our Husband, Isa. liv. 5, to love us, provide for, and enrich us ; our King, to govern, protect, and defend us ; our Physician, to heal us ; our Shepherd to guide us ; yea, he is instead of all relations to us.

3. A right and title to God, and all that he is.

(1.) All that he is personally. The Father is ours, to love us, and contrive our redemption. John xvi. 27. The Son is ours, to be our ransom, and satisfy the claims of justice; to be born for us, to live, to die, &c. Isa. ix. 6. Cant. ii. 16. The Holy Ghost is ours, to apply redemption, to change our hearts, to teach, to sanctify, to dwell in us, to conduct and guide us to glory. 1 Cor. iii. 16.

(2.) All that he is essentially. All his glorious attributes and perfections; they are all ours. His mercy, to pardon, remove guilt, to sympathize with, and comfort in all our trials. His wisdom, to provide, to counsel, and direct all things to our good. His omnipotence, to guard, protect, support, and preserve to salvation. His goodness, to enrich with all good things, grace and glory. His omniscience, to watch over, and warn against approaching danger. His holiness is our fountain of grace, to sanctify and make us holy. His omnipresence, to attend and solace, in all places and conditions. His justice, to reward, and give us heaven, and also to punish those who do us wrong. His all-sufficiency is our inheritance, to give us a complete and perfect happiness. His unchangeableness is the rock of our security. His faithfulness is the pledge and security for the accomplishment of his promises, and his eternity is the date of our happiness.

4. All that he has shall be made over to us. All are yours. 1 Cor. iii. 21.

All the promises are ours, both of this life and that which is to come: the promises of pardon, healing, sanctification, quickening, strength, comfort, grace, and glory.

All his gifts and graces. Faith, love, hope, fear, humility, patience, and all the fulness there is in Christ: it is all ours.

All his creatures are ours. His creatures upon earth, to serve and sustain us; his angels in heaven, to guard and encamp about us. The earth is our sojourning place; the heaven our inheritance and home.

II. That such are truly happy; yea, it is the very summit of their happiness to have the Lord for their God. And this will appear when we consider,

1. The greatness of their portion. It includes every thing that is great and good. It is pleasant for a man to survey his temporal interests; to walk about his plantations, gardens, flocks, fields, &c. but what are these to the believer's portion?

2. The suitableness of the promises. All that we can desire or want is included therein. Are our sins great? here is Christ's blood to atone and cleanse. Are we poor? here is fine gold. Are we blind? here is eye-salve. Are we naked? here is white raiment. Are we starving? here is manna, and the fatted calf. Are we diseased? here is the balm of Gilead. Are we prisoners? here is deliverance for the captives. Are we drowned in debt? here is an all-sufficient surety. Are we dead? here is the resurrection and the life. Phil. iv. 19.

3. That it takes the terror out of every thing that is naturally terrible to man. The holiness and justice of God: the former is their fountain of grace, and the latter the security of their happiness. 1 John i. 9. Afflictions: it alters the very nature of them, and renders them beneficial to the believer. Ps. cxix. 71. Isa. xxvii. 9. Death: it may strip

us of other comforts, but it cannot dissolve our connexion with God. Ps. xlviii. 14. 'The day of judgment: it is the day of our Lord's coming, and we are to appear with him in glory. Col. iii. 4. Hence we are to lift up our heads with joy, &c. Luke xxi. 28.

4. It sweetens every other comfort and blessing.

It sweetens the thoughts of Christ to a believer. "All he did and suffered was for me: he still thinks on me, and pleads for me." Ps. civ. 34.

It sweetens the ordinances of the gospel; such as prayer, hearing the word, and receiving the Lord's Supper. It is their Father's throne, his word, and his table; he gives them a hearty welcome. Cant. v. 1.

It sweetens the thoughts of his works, both of creation and providence. The earth is their Father's footstool; the heavens his palace, where he dwells, and where they shall be with him for ever. All the dispensations of Providence are promoting their welfare, and preparing them for heaven.

It sweetens all outward mercies; they receive them as tokens of his love, and as fruits of the Redeemer's purchase. These words belong to them. Eccl. ix. 7.

I shall now close this discourse with some application of it. And,

1. How dreadful is the state of those who have not the Lord for their God! As they are without God, so they are without hope. Eph. ii. 12. But, if you would wish to have God for your God, you must,

2. Renounce all his enemies and rivals, Hos. xiv. 8, Satan, and all subjection to him. The world, with its spirit, pleasures, and pride. The flesh, with its lusts. Your own righteousness, in point of dependence, for justification and dependence.

3. You must heartily accept of God in Christ, as your soul's portion and inheritance. Ps. lxxiii. 25. But observe how God is to be chosen: only in and through Christ, the Mediator. Accept of Christ, as your way to the Father; and of his satisfaction and merits, as your ransom from wrath and hell. And,

4. Dedicate yourself to God, and all that you have, wholly and unreservedly. 2 Chron. xxx. 8. Your souls, with all their powers and faculties; your bodies, with all their senses and members; and all your enjoyments, temporal and spiritual, to be employed for God and his honour, and to be entirely disposed of for his service and glory.

THE TEMPTED BELIEVER.

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, &c.—1 Thess. iii. 5.

THE life of the Christian upon earth is a continued warfare, not only with the corruption of their own hearts, and ungodly men, who reproach and persecute them, but likewise with the devil, who goes about. 1 Pet. v. 8. The ministers of the gospel are appointed by God to be instruments in turning men from the power of Satan; Acts xxvi. 17, 18; and when men are recovered from the power of the devil, still he does all

he can to destroy the work of grace within them, and is restless in his endeavours to accomplish their destruction : hence the text which is expressive of the apostle's fears, lest Satan should have gained an advantage over them : " For this cause," &c. I shall consider,

I. Why the devil is called the tempter, as also the other names which he bears in scripture.

1. Many of the angels sinned against God, and were banished from heaven to hell. 2 Pet. ii. 4. Jude, verse 6.

2. One of those apostate spirits is the head and chief over the rest. Matt. xii. 24—30.

3. He is called the tempter in the text, and in Matt. iv. 3. He tempted our first parents to disobedience, and dreadfully succeeded ; and he has been employed in this cursed work ever since, and has been but too successful in almost numberless instances.

4. He is called the wicked one. 1 John ii. 13. Originally, he was a good spirit ; but now a bad one, full of evil, sin and wickedness.

5. He is called Satan, which signifies an enemy. 1 Pet. v. 8. Such he is both to God and man.

6. He is called the serpent, 2 Cor. xi. 3 ; and that old serpent, Rev. xii. 9. Constantly striving by his cunning wiles to deceive and ensnare mankind.

7. He is compared to a strong man, Matt. xii. 29 ; and he with those who serve under him, are called principalities and powers, Eph. vi. 12 ; they are many in number, and great in strength ; but Christ is stronger than them all.

8. He is called the prince of this world, John xiv. 30 ; and the god of this world, 2 Cor. iv. 4. He reigns over a great part of mankind, who are in subjection to him, and who do him homage.

9. He is called the devil, 1 Pet. v. 8 ; which word in the Greek language signifies a slanderer, or false accuser, and hence he is called the accuser of the brethren, who accuses them before God day and night, Rev. xii. 10 ; and a liar, John viii. 44. He told Adam that he should not die, Gen. iii. 4, 5. He suggested to Eve, as if God envied the happiness of his creature. He brought an accusation of hypocrisy against Job to God. Job i. 1—13. He accuses the saints to themselves, that they have no grace in their hearts, &c.

II. The ways and methods by which he tempts the people of God.

1. He suggests his temptations, in an eternal manner, to the minds of the saints. In some cases, it is difficult to discern the temptations of the devil, from the evil thoughts of our own hearts : nature is generally pleased with its own productions ; but when evil thoughts come upon us by force and violence and the mind revolts from them with abhorrence, we may reasonably conclude that they are suggested by Satan.

2. He makes use of other beings as instruments in tempting ; he tempted Eve, by the agency of the serpent ; Gen. iii. 1—5 ; he tempted Job, by the agency of his wife, to curse God, &c. Job ii. 9, 10 ; he tempted Christ, by Peter, one of his own disciples, to prevent his dying. Matt. xvi. 21—23. See our Lord's answer in verse 23.

3. There is no earthly comfort, which God has given to his children, but may, through the stratagems of Satan, assisted by the remaining depravity of their own hearts, become a snare to them.

4. He knows how to tempt the saints to sin, by their near relations ; but they should never comply with any advice which is not consistent with the word of God, which is a light, &c. Ps. cxix. 105.

III. The special times and seasons in which he assaults them.

Indeed he is restless in his endeavours against the saints at all times, continually laying his snares to deceive them ; always tempting, vexing, and disquieting them ; but there are special seasons, when Satan directs all his forces against them with the greatest malice, fury, and rage. And this is done especially,

1. When they are under the first awakenings of the Spirit of God, and inquiring what they must do to be saved ; he suggests to them, that it is too soon to believe in Christ, and to serve God ; that their sins are too many, and too great to be forgiven ; that the duties of religion are so many and great, that they shall never be able to perform them ; while he excites their ungodly relations and former companions in sin to oppose and dissuade them from the service of God.

2. When they are suffering under temporal affliction, he tempts them to impatience, and hard thoughts of God, and sometimes to use unlawful means to deliver themselves out of their troubles ; but they are quietly to wait for the salvation of God. Lam. iii. 26. The way of tribulation is the way to heaven. Acts xiv. 22. Rom. viii. 17. 29. Rev. ii. 10.

3. When the Lord, in an unusual manner, refreshes them with the consolations of his Spirit : the more that God manifests a sense of his love to their souls, the more does Satan discover his hatred of them. 2 Cor. xii. 7 ; at such seasons he tempts them to pride and self-conceit, to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think.-

4. When they, owing to a cessation from temptation for a season, had concluded he had left them ; at such seasons they are apt to be remiss in duty, and off their guard ; upon which he returns with redoubled violence, and sometimes gains great advantage over them.

5. When the providence of God raises them to eminent offices and stations in life. When David was advanced to the throne, the devil tempted him to number the people, with which God was exceedingly displeased. 1 Chron. xxi. 1—14.

When Joshua, the high-priest, was standing before the angel of the Lord, Satan stood at his right hand to resist him. Zech. iii. 1.

The devil likewise excites his instruments to cast out unjust reproaches and aspersions upon eminent characters, to lessen their usefulness, and to hinder the progress of true religion in the world.

6. When they are about to leave this world. Envious of the eternal joys they are going to possess, he assaults them most violently, and the nearer to heaven they are, the more violent his assaults will be. He revives the remembrance of their past sins ; suggests the idea that all their religious experience was a delusion, and their religious profession hypocrisy ; and thus sometimes brings them into darkness. In such circumstances they must look to the promises of God, where the Lord has promised to be with his people. Heb. xiii. 5.

IV. Why Satan is permitted to tempt the people of God.

1. That they may be conformed to Christ, for he is the head, and they are the members ; and are to be conformed to him in holiness, suf-

ferings, temptations, and everlasting felicity. Rom. viii. 29. Having been tempted with him, they are to reign with him. Luke xxii. 28, 29.

2. That their graces may be tried; that they may shine brighter, and exhibit the most luminous evidence of their truth and reality. Jam. i. 12.

3. That God may display his wisdom, power, and love in supporting them under their temptations, and in giving them the victory over the enemy. 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9.

4. That they may be kept humble, and retain a deep sense of their entire dependence upon God. 2 Cor. xii. 7.

5. The Lord permits his saints, and especially the ministers of the gospel, to be assaulted by Satan in a grievous manner, that they may be able to administer comfort to others when under the power of temptation: although God is the author of all consolation, yet he conveys that comfort to tempted saints through the medium of his ministers, and other pious souls. 2 Cor. i. 4, 5, 6.

I shall conclude the subject by a short application.

1. Let not believers be discouraged on account of the power and malice of the devil; but resist him, relying by faith upon God their Saviour: there is no need for despondency, for the Lord of Hosts is on their side. Eph. vi. 10, 11, 13—17.

2. When they are tempted, let them fly to God by prayer. He commands them to do so, and has promised every necessary assistance, not only grace to pardon, but help in time of need. Eph. vi. 18; Heb. iv. 16.

OF GOD'S WITHDRAWINGS FROM HIS PEOPLE.

O the hope of Israel.—Jer. xiv. 8.

THIS chapter was penned during a great dearth in the land of Judah, occasioned by a grievous drought and want of rain, which the prophet here laments as a token of God's withdrawing his presence from them.

The prophet's design, in the text and context, is to deprecate God's judgments, and especially that terrible one, of God withdrawing his presence from his church and people. Why shouldst thou be a stranger, &c. In speaking from these words, I shall,

I. Consider when it may be said that God withdraws, and behaves as a stranger to his people.

1. When he withholds his wonted acts of kindness from them; sees them in trouble, and does not come to their relief. Of this the church complains. Isa. lxiii. 15. See also the complaint of Gideon. Judges vi. 13.

2. When he threatens to remove from his people the signs and symbols of his presence, the word and sacraments: when he permits their enemies to combine and carry on their plans for that purpose. Lam. v. 9.

3. When, though the ordinances and sacraments are continued, yet the Lord withholds his usual blessings on such occasions, yea, blasts them according to those awful words in Mal. ii. 2. When ministers are straitened in preaching, and the people are straitened in hearing, when

all is cold and dead, and no live coal is brought from the altar of God to kindle the fire.

4. When the Lord frowns upon his people in the course of his providence, denies them outward mercies, and brings temporal calamities upon them. So, when Zion's captivity was prolonged, she cried out, "the Lord hath forsaken," &c. Isa. xlix. 14.

5. When he denies them access to himself in duty, and breaks off his wonted correspondence with them. They seek him in public and private ordinances, but they cannot find him. Job's language is theirs. Job xxiii. 3. Also Jeremiah's. Lam. iii. 8.

II. The reasons why the Lord deals thus with his people. And surely there must be a cause on their part, as Infinite Goodness can never take delight in thus afflicting his own children.

In general, sin is the cause, as will appear from Isa. lix. 2. As,

1. When they fall into gross sin, and bring a reproach upon religion and the good ways of the Lord. Isa. i. 13, 14. This is plain in David's case; 2 Sam. xii. 14; compared with Psalm li. 11.

2. When they turn earthly-minded, and prefer the pleasures of sense to the blessed Redeemer and the pleasures of true religion. Isa. lvii. 17. When the Gergesenes preferred their swine to Christ, he turned his back, and departed from their coast. Matt. viii. 34.

3. When they turn slothful and formal in duty, and do not stir themselves up to seek God's face. Cant. iii. 1.

4. When we neglect or slight the Mediator, by whom we have access to God; either by not looking to him for strength to perform our duty, or by making a saviour of our duties, and so putting them in the place of Christ.

5. When we sin under, or after great afflictions, appointed to reclaim us. Isa. lvii. 17.

6. When we do not cherish and entertain the influences of his Holy Spirit on our hearts. Cant. v. 2, 3, 6, 7.

7. When we grow hardened and impenitent, under provocations, so that we have neither a due sense of our own sins, nor of the sins of the land we live in. Hos. v. 15.

III. When it may be said that we are properly exercised under such a painful dispensation.

1. When we are truly sensible of our loss, and that our sin is the cause of it; when we mourn and lament after the Lord, as the prophet does in the text and context, and as Israel in the days of Samuel. 1 Sam. vii. 2.

2. When we place all our happiness in God's favour and presence, dissatisfied with every other comfort, looking upon sun, moon, health, wealth, honours, pleasures, houses, relations, yea, life itself, as empty and comfortless without God, regarding him as the hope of Israel, and our only desire. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

3. When we engage all the powers of our souls to seek after God. Ps. cxix. 10. For God takes particular notice of those who do so. Jer. xxx. 21.

4. When we diligently embrace every opportunity, and use every appointed means for finding an absent God. Cant. iii. 2.

5. When we wrestle with him in prayer, that he may return to us again, with the prophet using every argument for that purpose. He pleads the glory of his name: "for thy name's sake." Their hopeless state without him: "O the hope," &c. His former kindness to them: "the saviour in time of trouble." His power: "why shouldst thou," &c. Ver. 9. The outward symbols of his presence: "thou art in our midst." Ver. 9. The covenant relation: "we are called by thy name." Ver. 9. Upon all such accounts, we beseech thee not to leave us.

6. When we are dissatisfied with the best means, unless we find God in them. David was not content with the tabernacle, the ark, sacrifices, the passover, &c. but in the midst of all he cried for God. Ps. lxxxiv. 2.

IV. Whence is it that the Lord being as a stranger to his people, occasions them so much concern?

1. Because of the incomparable happiness arising from the enjoyment of his presence. His presence brings with it light, life, health strength, peace, comfort, heaven itself; and, when he withdraws, we may cry out with Micah, Judges xviii. 24.

2. Because of the sad effects which attend the want of his presence, great darkness; Lam. iii. 2, much deadness, John xi. 21; disability for duty, Ps. lxxxviii. 4. xl. 12. John xv. 5; great barrenness, John xv. 6; exposure to danger and enemies, Num. xiv. 9; great anxiety when calling to mind former blessings, Ps. lxxvii. 3; melancholy and unwelcome thoughts of death and judgment, for it is only his presence that can cheer the gloomy vale, Ps. xxiii. 4; the fear of being entirely rejected. Ps. lxxvii. 9, 10; cxix. 8.

I shall conclude this subject by a few inferences from what has been said; and,

1. We may hence learn that there are but few true seekers of God among us. Many are troubled for other trifling losses; but few that can say with David, "Thou didst hide thy face," &c. Ps. xxx. 7.

2. We may see the misery of those who are far from God now, and are like to be deprived of his presence for ever. Ps. lxxiii. 27. Ungodly men desire not his presence, but say, "depart from us;" Job xxi. 14; and alas! their choice will be their punishment, and that for ever; Matt. xxv. 41.

3. How sad must be the case of those whom God forsakes, never to return again! And it is to be feared that this was the case with Saul. 1 Sam. xvi. 14. May the Lord preserve us from so great an evil, and grant us the enjoyment of his presence both here and in heaven for ever! Amen.

THE CHRISTIAN'S OBLIGATIONS TO CELEBRATE THE LORD'S SUPPER.

I will wash mine hands, &c.—Ps. xxvi. 6.

THESE words have in them no remarkable difficulty; they are a plain allusion to that known custom of washing before sacrificing, both amongst the Jews and the Gentiles. All the eastern nations were very fre-

quent in their washings, especially before they approached their most solemn and sacred mysteries; and, therefore, I may more safely apply this text to the highest mystery amongst the Christians, which is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which now requires in a peculiar manner, our attention and meditation.

I shall confine my discourse at present to two particulars:

I. Our duty and obligation of coming to the Lord's Supper.

1. The authority of him who enjoins it. All the sects of philosophers thought it their honour and their interest to propagate the opinions of the first of their order; and shall our dearest Lord and Master give us a command of the highest consequence, and dare we refuse to obey it? What indignity would this be to his authority! what an affront to his sovereignty and power! Luke xxii. 19.

2. The circumstances of his love, wherewith this institution was appointed. Jesus was in the midst of his disciples: he was within a few hours of his death; he appointed this sacrament as the highest and last pledge of his love to his church; how then can we refuse our presence and obedience? How strong are the charms of his love!

3. The practice of the first Christians. It was a part of their daily worship: they considered it as the most substantial and highest cordial that he left for the support of his church until he come again. They could not live without the daily commemoration of the love of Jesus.

4. It is the peculiar character of Christianity, the badge of our religion, the livery of the crucified Jesus. We are in this sacrament to show forth the Lord's death.

Unto God, as our atonement. Heb. iv. 15, 16. It is by this blood and sacrifice that we plead successfully for mercy and compassion. This is the argument which God himself cannot resist, if urged by faith and charity.

To men, as our profession. We openly proclaim that we will not desert his standard; that we are not ashamed of Christ crucified; that we are the disciples of the cross in the strictest sense; that we are resolved to let our light shine. Matt. v. 16.

To devils, in open defiance of all the powers of hell. Rom. viii. 34, 35. The devils may tremble unto fear and despair, when they see us listed under the standard of so great a Captain, so famous a warrior, so steadfast and resolute a Friend.

5. The efficacy and excellency of this sacrament. It is the most significant and sensible representation of the death and passions of our Lord; and, therefore, all the graces of the Spirit do meet in their vigour and exaltation at this sacrament: and what need have we of such a remedy to blow up our zeal into a bright and unquenchable flame!

6. Our obligations appear from the vanity and impertinence of those excuses, which are usually pretended, to divert men from this ordinance, Such as,

Their worldly business and incumbrances, preferring the meanest things to their greatest concerns; to dissemble with the Almighty, who knows that our time is not so narrow, but that we have leisure to look after our souls. The sight of their sins; but if they are humbled on the account of them, the sacrament in its very nature and tendency is designed for them, for broken-hearted sinners. Matt. ix. 13. The danger of recei-

ving unworthily is very great; but the danger of contemning and vilifying a plain institution of our Saviour's, perhaps is of an equal, if not of more terrible consequence. Their hopes of future amendment, and greater preparations: but this is the most pernicious subterfuge that can be invented. Our time runs away; our spiritual strength is decayed; our hearts are growing harder; and is it safe to delay our cure one moment longer? Ps. xc. 7, 8. I shall,

II. Direct you in your approaches to the holy table of the Lord. All which may be summed up in the words of St. Paul, 1 Cor. xi. 28, 29.

It is gross stupidity to think that, by shunning the Lord's Supper, we may escape damnation; for the very sins in which we continue unreformed, and which indispose us for the Eucharist, are the true causes of damnation. Let us then examine, and try our ways, and turn again unto God. Let me advise you,

1. To retire for a season, that excluding the busy world from your thoughts, you may employ a suitable portion of your time in self-examination, meditation, and prayer.

2. Judge yourself with all severity; 1 Cor. xi. 31; neither hide nor extenuate your sins before God, who knows your thoughts afar off, and adopt the confession of the prodigal son. Luke xv. 21.

3. Approach this sacrament with strong resolutions to be at last revenged on your sins; and let your resolutions not only be vigorous and fervent, but fixed against particular sins to which your inclinations are more violent and forward; beseeching the Lord to gird his victorious sword upon his thigh, and eradicate our evil habits, to rise us up, &c. Num. x. 35.

4. With full trust in the mercy of God. He will not quench the smoking flax, &c. Matt. xii. 20. The water that he gives is a well of water, &c. John iv. 14. Do not entertain narrow notions of the Almighty, as if he delighted in the death of sinners, as if he took pleasure in their miseries: for God is love, and it is below his infinite Majesty to crush to ruin and destruction such as appeal to his mercy.

5. Reconciled to thy brother. Peace and love are the dispositions that make our souls fit mansions for the Holy Ghost: the vapours and smoke of contention drive him from our habitations. Matt. v. 23. And the same direction for the matter is repeated, Matt. vi. 14. We are to lay aside all malice, &c. 1 Pet. ii. 1; and live as brethren. Gal. v. 13, 14. Putting on, "as the elect of God," &c. Col. iii. 12—14. True and universal love is the great glory and perfection of our religion, in which Christians ought to outshine all others. Our blessed Saviour, after he had commanded us to love our enemies, concludes with this, "Be ye therefore perfect," &c. Matt. v. 48.

THE

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.

Train up a child, &c.—Prov. xxii. 6.

THE religious education of children is of great importance to the church, to the government, and to the several communities to which they stand related. The religion, wisdom, and happiness; the probity, virtue, so-

briety, industry, and prosperity of the rising generation, are interested in it, and very much, under God, depend upon it.

Solomon, who was a good man, and the wisest of kings, who well understood the interests of church and state, was fully apprised of the advantage of a good education; and, by the inspiration of the Almighty, delivered the Holy Ghost's and his own sentiments upon it in our text: in which we have,

I. A duty recommended and enjoined: "Train up a child in the way he should go;" or, as it might be more justly rendered, Train up a child in his way.

What is it to train up a child.

A child is put indefinitely for any child or children, male or female, high or low, rich or poor, bond or free; or for every young person that is under our charge or influence.

The word translated a child, is used with great latitude in scripture, and runs through all the dates of infancy, childhood, and youth: and the word translated "train up," signifies to dedicate, initiate, instruct, and set in order.

It is but natural to suppose, that the children to be trained up are such as are come to the years of understanding; and implies,

1. Good instruction. Religious principles should be early and frequently opened to them, and inculcated upon them. Their minds should be filled with light, and their consciences with a sense of God's authority. What God has taught us, we should teach them: hence his charge to Israel. Deut. vi. 6, 7. A like charge is repeated in the New Testament. Eph. vi. 4. How elegantly does the Psalmist represent this as God's way of perpetuating the knowledge of himself upon earth! Ps. lxxviii. 3—7. Accordingly Solomon took this method with his children, as his father David did with him. Prov. iv. 1—4. And this was Timothy's great advantage. 2 Tim. i. 5; iii. 15.

2. Good discipline and government. They must be prudently managed, as well as taught. Abraham commanded, as well as taught his children and household to keep the way of the Lord; and for want of which, Eli and his house were severely punished. 1 Sam. iii. 11—14.

Childhood and youth are vanity; Eccl. xi. 10; and therefore, should be observed with a watchful eye, and governed with a steady hand. Their time, diversions, employments, tempers, manners, dress, words, gestures, should be under proper restraints, corrections, injunctions, and encouragements, as occasions offer. Governors of Christian families should take up and see to the performance of Joshua's holy resolution. Josh. xxiv. 15.

Religious parents should take care how they dispose of their sons and daughters in marriage, by placing them in families that fear God. Gen. xxvii. 46.

3. Good examples. We must take care that they never see us do what we order them to avoid, and never see us neglect what we order them to do, that our lives may never give the lie to our instructions. If examples are good, they throw a lustre upon precepts, and allure to a happy imitation. Prov. xiii. 2. Hence David's pious resolve. Ps. ci. 2, 3.

4. Fervent prayer. The best instructions, discipline, and examples,

will be ineffectual to their desired end, without a special blessing from God upon them. How earnestly should we wrestle with God for them, that Christ might be formed in them ! Abraham's prayer should be ours. Gen. xvii. 18. But,

What is it to train up a child in his way ?

Not in the way in which his own corrupt nature would lead him, but in the way in which God would have him walk in.

And this, in general, is the way of the Lord : the way of knowledge, duty, and happiness ; the way in which all the saints have gone to heaven, and in which we ourselves are going, and hope to carry our children with us ; the way of the scriptures, in distinction from all other ways of our own, or other men's devising ; the way of truth and holiness, in opposition to error and vice ; the way of true religion and godliness.

But to be more particular.

1. We should train them up in the way in which they should go to God for acceptance with him, and for all sorts of blessings from him ; and that is through Jesus Christ. John xiv. 6.

If our children are far from God, they must perish. Ps. lxxiii. 27.

We should teach them what Christ is : God-man, Prophet, Priest, and King ; and that there is salvation in no other. Acts iv. 12.

The necessity of faith to obtain the Divine favour, and get to heaven hereafter.

To pray to God, in the name of Christ, pleading his death as the ground of our pardon, &c.

2. In the way in which they should walk before God in Christ ; and that is, in the way of all holy obedience to his commandments.

They should be trained to the worship of God : reading, hearing God's word, keeping his sabbath ; yielding themselves to God, in acts of faith, repentance, love, &c. An awe of God should be urged upon them.

They should be obliged, by prudent engaging, yet authoritative measures, to the performance of moral duties toward God, their neighbour, and themselves ; and restrained, as much as possible, from outward acts of sin, cursing, pride, &c. &c.

And if all gentle methods have been tried in vain ; if fair reasonings, solemn charges, encouragements, and threatenings, will not do, then correction, with mercy and prudence, will be necessary. Prov. xxix. 17.

3. In the way of strength, to go to God, and walk acceptably before him ; and that is, by the special assistance of the Holy Ghost.

They must be made acquainted with the corruption of their nature ; their inability to do good of themselves ; the nature and necessity of the Spirit's work upon them, to enlighten, change their hearts, &c.

They must be instructed to attempt every thing in the name and strength of the Lord ; and to receive the encouragements of the gospel, to seek and hope for the Holy Spirit, &c.

II. The encouragement to this duty, taken from the great advantage and success of it. " And when he is old he will not depart from it."

When he is old ; that is, when he has arrived to years of maturity, and even to the latest age of life.

But this is not to be understood as if a good education would entail

grace upon our children ; it is but the means, God must give the increase. 1 Cor. iii. 5—7.

Nor yet, that none who are well trained, should ever eventually depart from the good ways in which they have been educated. Sad experience, in all ages, has proved the contrary.

Yet the text is encouraging ; for,

1. Training them up in the way they should go, is the most likely means to prevent their departing from it.

Though it is but a means, it is a means happily suited to its end. It assists their feeble thoughts, directs their giddy tempers, marks out a way for them, that they may not be left in the dark ; it leads them to think seriously ; it lays hold on their tender minds, anticipates temptations, and subverts the work of the ministry.

One great reason why so many children go astray, is, I fear, owing to family religion being at such a low ebb.

2. They will not easily depart from it. The light of education cleaves close to them. It is with them when they are alone, in company, in danger, and in the prospect of death. Their early convictions make a stand against their corrupt inclinations. God's Spirit by these means, strives long with them, and does not quickly give them up.

3. They will not ordinarily depart from it. Early impressions seldom, comparatively speaking, wear wholly off ; and very often God is pleased to seal instruction, and crown a religious education with his special grace.

The text may be taken as an indefinite promise, like that which God made to Abraham, the success of which was very comfortable in many branches of his family. Gen. xviii. 19. And, oh ! how many have heartily blessed God for religious parents and masters, who have trained them up in his way !

I shall conclude with some application of the subject. And,

1. Let those of you, whether professing parents or masters, that have young people under your charge, see that you train them up in the way they should go.

This is a matter of vast consequence. The souls of your children and servants are trusts committed to your care, and Christ will inquire one day how you have discharged them.

All your children are a part, and ought to be a very dear part, of yourselves ; and, according to the ways they walk in, they will be the torments and disgrace, or the comforts and glory of your lives.

You are careful about their bodies, to feed and clothe them, &c. but think on what Christ has said, Matt. vi. 33.

Have pity, O my friends, have pity on your children's souls, and embrace every opportunity of doing them good.

2. To those who are or have been trained up in the way of the Lord. Your minds are young and tender ; you have treacherous hearts within you, innumerable enemies and temptations around you : you do not know what is proper and best for you.

Listen then to the good counsel of your serious and more experienced friends, and of those that God has set over you. Prov. xxx. 17 ; xxix. 1.

Your souls are precious, and must quickly be in eternal happiness, or in eternal misery, as certainly as the souls of others.

You have more knowledge, and it may be, more convictions than many others : take care not to act against your knowledge, or stifle your convictions. Luke xii. 47.

If, after all, you depart from the good ways of the Lord, you will be of all creatures most miserable.

If there are any among you, that have begun to apostatize from a good education, I pity you at my heart. Your case is awfully threatening. May the Lord awaken and reclaim you, bring you back to his way, that you may never more depart from it !

EARLY PIETY.

They that seek me early, &c.—Prov. viii. 17.

THESE words, together with the whole chapter, are Wisdom's speech to the sons of men. Verses 1, 4, 6. This wisdom is supposed by some to be the essential wisdom of God, or that attribute of the Divine nature which bears that name ; and by others, that knowledge of God, which he gives us in and by his word. According to the best interpreters, ancient and modern, Christ, the personal wisdom of God, is here to be understood. He is called in scripture the Word, and the Word of God, Wisdom, and the Wisdom of God, by way of eminence and peculiarity. Col. ii. 3. This, then, is he, who, in the text, says, "Those who seek me early," &c. I shall,

I. Consider what it is to seek Christ early.

Seeking the Lord, is sometimes used in scripture for the particular duty of prayer ; and, at other times, for the whole of religion. In this last sense, it may be understood in Ps. xxii. 26, 27 ; and Isa. li. 1.

Accordingly, to seek Christ, as it relates to the object of our seeking, or that which we seek for, is to seek the true knowledge of him, and a saving interest in him. It is to seek his favour and acceptance, his guidance and assistance, his righteousness, grace, government, image, glory, his smiles in this world, and all the blessedness of the next.

And as it relates to the acts of seeking him, it is to attend upon all the means of grace with seriousness, faith, hope, love, and delight.

But we are to seek him early.

1. With respect to the time of life, or in the younger part of our days.

In this sense of the word, it is said, "he that loveth his son, chasteneth him betimes." Prov. xiii. 24. That is to say, while he is yet young.

So, to seek Christ early, is to seek him betimes, like good Josias ; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 2 ; and like young Timothy. 2 Tim. iii. 15. Hence says Solomon, "Remember," &c. Eccl. xii. 1.

This great concern must not be put off till the busy time of life, nor yet to old age : these are not fit seasons for transactions of this kind.

It is never too soon to seek Christ ; but quickly, alas ! none know how soon, it may be too late.

None ever repented that they began too soon, but many have been ashamed that they began so late.

2. With regard to the day of grace, or to our opportunities of seeking him.

Thus the word in our text is used to express the earliest opportunities, or occasions, for seeking after God. In this sense Bildad said to Job: "If thou wouldest seek unto God," &c. Job viii. 5, 7. And the same word is used of Israel. Ps. lxxviii. 34. And, says God, "I will go," &c. Hos. v. 15.

Whenever God calls us by his word or providence to seek after Christ, we should be early in attending to those calls, saying, with Samuel, "Speak, Lord," &c. 1 Sam. iii. 9; with David, Ps. xxvii. 8.

Some of you, perhaps, for want of inclination, or for want of opportunity, have spent the early part of your lives without hearing the gospel, or enjoying the means of grace. But now, you are highly favoured in this respect. This is your season to seek early after Christ, and not suffer this opportunity to slip. Heb. iii. 15. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

3. With respect to all other things, or before and above all things else.

This relates to the earnestness and fervour with which he is to be sought in the younger part of our days, and in the first opportunities we have for seeking him.

And thus it is to be understood in Ps. lxiii. 1, 2; in Ps. xxvii. 4; and also in Ps. xlii. 1, 2. In this sense, seeking Christ early, is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. It is to seek him with the whole heart. It is to seek him with the utmost intenseness and unitedness of all the powers and faculties of the soul, and that before the heart is filled with other things. And, among other seasons, it is to seek him in the morning, or earliest part of the day, before the mind is diverted or embarrassed by the pleasures or business of the day. Ps. cxix. 58.

II. Consider what peculiar encouragements there are to such as seek Christ early, that they shall find him.

1. Early seeking him is most pleasing to him. This verse seems to intimate thus much: "I love them that love me," says Christ, as if to show his peculiar complacency in those that early show their love.

The prophet tells us that the great Shepherd of the sheep would gather the lambs with his arm. Isa. xl. 11. How tenderly did he express his affections to young ones! Mark x. 14, 16. He patronized the children's hosannas. Matt. xxi. 15, 16. And when the young prodigal came to himself, how affectionately did he receive him! Luke xv. 17—20.

God, speaking of Israel under the character of a child, says, "Then I loved him." Hos. xi. 1, 2, 4. Jer. ii. 2, 3.

What kind of notice did God take of good Josiah, who, while yet young, began to seek after the God of David his father? 2 Kings xxii. 19, 20.

He will never forget the kindness of his people's youth, and he would have them to be mindful of them all their days, saying, "Wilt thou not from this time," &c. Jer. iii. 4.

2. It is the ordinary course of Divine grace to be found of early seekers.

Observation and experience satisfy us that it is exceeding rare for persons in old age to be turned to God. There have been a few instances,

but they bear no proportion to the multitudes who have been brought to seek the Lord in their early days. All the churches mentioned in the New Testament were chiefly made up of such early converts.

3. Early seekers have fewer obstructions to their seeking and finding Christ than others have.

The earlier you seek him, the fewer provocations there are in you to grieve the Holy Spirit in striving with you ; the less stupid and hardened you will be in your iniquity ; the less unyielding to the impressions of his grace ; the less confirmed in the habits of sin ; the less liable to the temptations of Satan, to the entanglements, snares, cares, and troubles of this evil world. The longer you put it off, the greater difficulty you will find in being reclaimed ; hence that alarming exhortation of the prophet, Jer. xiii. 23.

4. There are peculiar promises made to early seekers.

There are many promises to other seekers of every age. Prov. viii. 34, 35. Isa. xl. 31. Jer. xxix. 13. Also in the New Testament. Matt. v. 6 ; vii. 7 ; xi. 28, 29. John vi. 37 ; vii. 37—39.

Besides these, there are peculiar promises to young people. That in our text is peremptory : “those that seek me early shall find me ;” and, in finding him, find every thing that is worth finding. Prov. viii. 18—21.

There are others made to such under the figure of Solomon’s son. Prov. ii. 1—5.

The children of believing parents have many promises to encourage their faith. Gen. xvii. 7. Deut. xxx. 6. Isa. xlv. 3, 5.

The Lord will hear the cry of fatherless children under their oppression. Ex. ii. 23.

And the blessed Lord has encouraged early seekers with a gracious promise, as to the things of this life. Matt. vi. 33.

Continuing in this happy course till advanced years. See what God says of them, Ps. xcii. 12—15.

I shall close the subject with some application.

1. Let young people take care of seeking after those things which will hinder them from seeking Christ.

This is the case with those who early seek their happiness in earthly pleasures, diversions, games, sports, and jollity, and extinguish all serious thoughts about Christ and religion ; such are in great danger of being hardened in their neglect, and perishing with a vengeance.

2. Let young ones go home, and pray over the encouragements they have heard to those that seek Christ early.

Tell him thou art come by his assistance, to him, thy early choice, and to make a full surrender of thyself to him.

Plead the encouragements he has given to early seekers, and beg of him to help thee to pray in faith.

3. Let those who have sought him early, still go on to seek him in all his ways. Hos. vi. 3.

4. Let not old sinners think themselves excluded from all hope. Though you have misspent all your youthful days, yet begin to seek him now, and do not despair of success, although it is at the eleventh hour. There is a gracious promise made to persons of every age and condition that come to him. John vi. 37 ; iii. 16.

And, for this very purpose, Christ is calling for you. Rev. iii. 20.

DEATH, AN IMPORTANT CHANGE.

All the days of my appointed time, &c.—Job xiv. 14.

IN the beginning of this chapter, Job states the brevity of human life ; verses 1, 2 ; the misery of that short life, full of trouble ; the certainty of death ; his days are determined, &c. Verse 5. Well might he, therefore, conclude with that good resolution of applying himself seriously to the work of preparation for his approaching end. “All the days,” &c. From which it will appear,

I. That there is a change which will befall the sons of men.

Death is a change, not an annihilation. It does not reduce us to nothing, but altereth our form something ; it changeth our order or manner of being, not our being absolutely. It is a change in these four respects.

1. It changes that near union of soul and body, and makes of one two severals. Death plucks them asunder, and divides them as far as heaven is from the earth.

2. It changes our country. Here we are strangers and pilgrims : but when death comes, we are changed to our city and place, the mansions prepared for the righteous.

3. It changes our company. In this life we converse with sinful men, empty creatures, infinite miseries, innumerable conflicts ; but, when death comes, all this will be changed ; we shall go to our God and Father, to our Christ and Saviour ; to the innumerable company, &c. Heb. xii. 22—24.

4. It changes our condition. It will remove us beyond the reach of temptation, sin, sorrow, and suffering. Death will close up all in an eternal night of oblivion.

This change of death will befall all men. Ps. lxxxix. 48. That all are subject to this change will appear,

1. From the quality of our lives, which in scripture are described by changeable things. It is compared to a show. Ps. xxxix. 6. To a vapour. James iv. 14. To a tale. Ps. xc. 9. To grass, and the flower of grass. Isa. xl. 6, 7. To the flower. Job xiv. 2. Yea, to a spider's web, to a weaver's shuttle, to a breath of a candle, to a journey, to the days of a hireling.

2. From the quality of our natures, in which there are two things that imply the certainty of our death.

Our composition. We are a tabernacle, reared of mouldering and decaying principles. Our bodies are called an earthly house.

Besides this, the sin and corruption of our natures, which, as it tears our lives with a continual vexation, so it is the proper and procuring cause of our death. Death is the punishment inflicted upon all men as the desert of sin. Rom. v. 12.

3. From the infallibility of God's decree. Heb. ix. 27. We may sooner expect the course of the heavens to be altered, than that the purpose of God, in this case, should be reversed. Gen. ii. 17. And this decree is executed every day.

Yesterday we were born of our natural mother, and, after a short pilgrimage in this vale of tears, we are again laid in the womb of our common mother, the earth. Ps. xc. 3.

II. That since our change is so certain, we should wait till our change come. Now, this waiting for our change implies,

1. Living in daily expectation of it; for waiting is an act of hope. Here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come; living as that just steward who waits the return of his master.

This consideration makes the king of terrors less terrible. It is a rule in nature, that all objects are less apt to disorder us, as we by custom have rendered them more familiar: thus, daily expecting and waiting for our change, will cure us of that starting and trembling which strangeness and surprise chiefly occasion in us.

2. Death is that passage whither all people are daily coming, and all must come one time or another, and where vast multitudes are cast away.

And shall we, to prevent present uneasiness, refuse to think of death till we are drawn down to the very brink, and must step in, whether we will or no? O wretched delusion! O deplorable condition! How many thousands who miscarry everlastingly, might have been saved and happy for ever, had they taken the pains to view this passage while at some distance from it!

That since our continuance in this world cannot be for ever, we ought, therefore, to wean ourselves from those things that cannot continue long with us.

How dreadful will death be to those who are wholly bent upon the concerns of this life, and never expect their change! To such death will come arrayed with all its pomp and terror. To take them from the world is to tear them from themselves; they are grown as it were one piece with it: it is as great a violence to separate them from it as to part their souls and bodies, and thereby they will suffer a double death. Prov. xiv. 32.

3. That we live so as that we may meet it cheerfully when it comes. We should be endeavouring to divest death of its sting; and this can be done no other way but by a sincere repentance, a lively faith in Jesus Christ, and a life of holy obedience to his commands.

But I must confess I am endeavouring to persuade you to a thing very much out of fashion in these days, for dying is usually the last thing we take care of. It is generally thought to be unreasonable and impertinent to advise men to think of their latter end while they are yet young, &c. Deut. xxxii. 29.

But let me for once be impertinent, whilst I remind such as these, that sometimes the strongest trees are blown down, whilst they that are old and sapless stand secure.

And let us remember, that all outward comforts will, at last, at that dread moment, drop from us.

4. And lastly, a patient submitting to the will of God, when he shall call us out of this world. We are in this world candidates for eternity; and when our state of probation is past, and the scene is ended, and the battle determined, we ought willingly to put off those tabernacles of clay, in hope of a happy resurrection. Job xiv. 14.

Thus may we all live, and thus may we all die, that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also may appear with him in glory! Col. iii. 4.

CONSTANCY CROWNED BY CHRIST.

Be thou faithful, &c.—Rev. ii. 10.

THESE are the words of our Saviour to the angel or pastor of the church of Smyrna; and they divide themselves into two parts, a precept and a promise. The precept is in these words: "Be thou faithful unto death." The promise in these: "And I will give," &c. There is the work in the one, and the reward in the other. I shall,

I. Consider the duty here recommended. Faithfulness here relates to the Lord Jesus Christ; our being true to our profession of his religion; to our repeated engagements with him to be his; our attachment to him, and our obedience to his commands; to continue therein to the end of our life. The necessity of this will appear, when we consider that,

1. Not to persevere, is a curtailed sacrifice, a maimed service, and such as God will not accept. No maimed beast was to be presented in sacrifice. Lev. xxii. 21, 22.

2. Inconstancy and instability is an argument of unsoundness and insincerity. Prov. xvii. 17.

3. Christ persevered for us, and, therefore, we ought to persevere for him. John xiii. 1. He is not only the beginning, but finisher of faith. Heb. xii. 2. He held out to the last gasp. John xix. 30.

4. It is a rule in civil law, that it is as nothing that holdeth not. A will unfinished is no will; a deed, unless it be signed, sealed, and delivered, is no deed.

5. The former part of our life yieldeth to the latter; and the latter part of our life carrieth away from the former. Ezek. xviii. 21, 22. And so on the other side also. Verse 24.

6. The end of every thing is all in all. Ps. xxxvii. 37; lxxiii. 17. The grand end of living should be to make a good end, to be found in peace. 2 Pet. iii. 14.

7. It is perseverance alone that carries away the crown: unless we are faithful unto death, there is no crown of life for us. Christianity is compared to a race. Heb. xii. 1. It is not he that cometh first, but every one that holdeth out to the last is crowned. Matt. xxiv. 13. Mark xiii. 13.

8. God himself is eternal, from whom we expect our reward; and the reward we look for is everlasting. "What hath levity and inconstancy," saith Augustine, "to do with eternity?"

And if we would be faithful to Christ our master, and hold out in our Christian course to the end, we must,

1. Enter upon it with resolution: we must count the cost. Luke xiv. 28—30. Lay our accounts with the worst, and prepare for it. Luke xiv. 33. It is for want of this, that many, who at first ran well, have been hindered.

2. Labour after sincerity. That which is counterfeit will not last long. Ps. lxxviii. 37. 1 Tim. iv. 1.

3. Be careful to keep a good conscience, which some have cast away. 1 Tim. i. 19; iii. 9.

4. Slight no sin. Every sin, however small, comparatively speaking, is of a deadly nature. The mote must be cast out, as well as the beam. Matt. vii. 3, 4.

5. Be jealous of thine own weakness; trust not too much to thine own strength. This was Peter's fault, and we know how foully he fell. Matt. xxvi. 33—35. John xiii. 37. And his fault is left upon record, as a warning to us.

6. Shun evil occasions. By unwatchfulness in this, thousands relapse into sin. 2 Pet. ii. 20. See David's case. Ps. cxlii. 3. Satan has his snares in our meat, drink, apparel, recreation, lawful delights, our trading, traffic, buying, and selling: we walk among snares, Job xxii. 10, and had need tread warily, Prov. iv. 25, 26, and walk wisely. Eph. v. 15.

7. Be much in prayer to God for support. Matt. xxvi. 41. It is from him that we must receive strength to stand. Eph. vi. 10, 11, 13. Thus prayed David. Ps. lxxxvi. 11.

8. Keep the fear of God alive in thy soul. Pray with David, Ps. lxxxvi. 11, and God will fulfil his promise. Jer. xxxii. 40.

9. Take heed of standing still; for he that begins to stand still will soon draw back; 2 Pet. iii. 17; and to prevent it, grow in grace. Ver. 18. If we be not growing, we are decaying.

10. Walk in humility. Take heed of pride. Remember Uzziah; 2 Chron. xxvi. 16; remember Hezekiah. 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26. It is a deadly poison, exceedingly displeasing to God, 1 Pet. v. 5, and destructive to the work of grace in the soul.

11. Consider the short time that this laborious course is required of us; it is only till death; and, as our life is short, that employment cannot be long that is to end with it. Not that our fidelity to Christ shall ever end, but our trials in consequence of it shall: they are but light and momentary. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

12. Be often surveying the royal reward promised in the text, as well as in other parts of the word of God. This was the case with Moses, Heb. xi. 25, 26, and the apostle, 2 Cor. iv. 8, 10, 16, 18. The reward is sure. Gal. vi. 9. It was the case with our Saviour, whose example we may safely imitate. Heb. xii. 2, 3. How important the apostle's advice! Heb. x. 35.

II. The gracious promise here given: "I will give," &c.

1. He that promises is Christ, ver. 8, and he is well able to make it good. Matt. xxviii. 18. Rev. iii. 21. He is the Amen, true and faithful. Rev. iii. 14. Those who are faithful to Christ shall find him faithful to them. Heb. x. 23.

2. What he gives is a free gift. We owe him all that we do or can do. Rom. viii. 12. We can claim nothing of him as our right, Rom. xi. 35, 36. He does not owe us so much as thanks. Luke xvii. 9, 10. Of his mere bounty he will not suffer us to go unrewarded.

3. The gift promised is a crown; 2 Tim. iv. 8; it is a kingdom.

Luke xii. 32. Matt. xxv. 34. Who would not strain hard for a crown? Who would not endure much for a kingdom?

4. This crown is a crown of life; not like the crowns that earthly kings wear, that cannot save them from disease and death. They may die, and do die. Ps. lxxxii. 7; cxlvi. 3, 4. But this is a crown that giveth life to him that hath it, and keepeth him in life that weareth it.

5. The life that this crown giveth, though not expressed here, is an eternal, everlasting life. Matt. xxv. 46. It is an incorruptible crown. 1 Pet. i. 4.

I shall now conclude with some improvement of the subject. And,

1. How ample shall be the recompense of the persevering Christian! This crown of life, of eternal life, will indeed be a glorious compensation for all his sacrifices, services, and sufferings which he has performed and endured for the sake of Christ. Mark x. 28—30. Luke xiv. 26, 33.

2. How deplorable the state of those who have forsaken their first love; Rev. ii. 4, 5; who run well for a while, and then give over; Gal. v. 7; who begin in the Spirit, and end in the flesh; Gal. iii. 3; who put their hand to the plough, and then look back; Luke ix. 62; as Lot's wife did towards Sodom; Gen. xix. 26; that, like Demas, follow Paul awhile, Col. iv. 14, and return again to the world, 2 Tim. iv. 10, and turn away from the holy commandment. Returning, like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to its wallowing in the mire. 2 Pet. ii. 20—22. Their last state is worse than the first. 2 Pet. ii. 20. Matt. xii. 45.

3. Let us consider what we lose if we give over, as well as what we gain, if we persevere. "Hold fast that no man take thy crown." Rev. iii. 11. And what a painful reflection will it be, to think that we have deprived ourselves of a crown, of a kingdom, of eternal felicity, for perhaps a mere trifle, the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season!

4. Be admonished, then, to hold fast, &c. ver. 25; to cleave to God; Acts xi. 23; to give all diligence, &c. Heb. vi. 17. And seeing that we know these things, &c. 2 Pet. iii. 17, then may we be faithful unto death, and receive at last the crown of life!

THE SUPERIORITY OF OUR KNOWLEDGE IN HEAVEN TO OUR KNOWLEDGE ON EARTH.

Then shall I know, &c.—1 Cor. xiii. 12.

AMIDST the many other glorious things that are spoken of the city of God; amidst the many other excellences of that blessed place, where the saints of God shall take up their everlasting abode, this is one, that they shall be blessed with a high and exalted measure of knowledge; that noble appetite and desire of knowing things, implanted in the human soul by the great Creator, shall be there sweetly filled and satisfied; our dimness and ignorance shall there be taken away, and we shall see God and his glories in clear and open light. "Then," says the apostle, "I shall know," &c.

In speaking from the passage before us, I shall,

I. Show, that the people of God shall be blessed in heaven with a more full and glorious knowledge.

1. We shall have a better knowledge of God. Not an absolute, perfect knowledge of God, that is impossible ; but such a knowledge of him as shall satisfy the soul ; and compared to which, all our present knowledge of him is as nothing. We shall see him as he is. 1 John iii. 2. We shall see his face unveiled. Ps. xvii. 15. All his perfections will then shine out with the brightest lustre.

2. We shall have a better knowledge of Christ ; for we shall be with him, and behold him, and converse with him. We shall see his face : and to this purpose he prays. John xvii. 24. In this blessed vision of Christ, Job rejoiced. Job. xix. 27.

3. We shall have a better knowledge of the work of creation ; we shall know more of the world than ever we could here, by dwelling in it ; more than the greatest philosopher. Then shall we see God's glories in the earth and in the deep ; we shall see his glories in every star, in every plant and vegetable, in every living creature, and especially in ourselves, our souls and bodies. 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

4. We shall have a better knowledge of the work of providence : so our Lord said to Peter. John xiii. 7. We shall then know how the world was governed ; how we were preserved ; provided for ; and why the best of men were so much tried and afflicted ; and how all these things worked together for their good.

5. We shall have a better knowledge of the work of redemption. Then we shall learn Christ's wonderful love from his own mouth. Then we shall understand the gospel in all its glories, its wisdom, mercy, and truth ; dark places will be made easy, and seemingly opposite places reconciled. We shall know more in one happy moment than the learned, with all their labour and study, could acquire. In heaven there will be no mistake, no error.

6. We shall have a better knowledge of the holy angels. We now read of their number, beauty, strength, and holiness, and their attention to ourselves ; but in heaven we shall be intimately acquainted with them, and converse with them. The patriarchs sometimes had communion with them on earth, but we shall have uninterrupted and everlasting communion with them in heaven. Heb. xii. 22. Rev. vii. 11. Luke xvi. 22.

7. We shall have a better knowledge of the saints. Even those we converse with now, we shall know better in heaven : we shall always be with them ; have no disagreements, no estrangements, no misunderstandings ; we shall know more of their excellences, and see them in all their beauty and glory. We shall know our contemporaries, however far distant as to space : the ancient worthies also, however distant as to time, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, &c. The apostles knew Moses and Elijah at Christ's transfiguration ; and St. Paul tells the Thessalonians that they should be his joy, &c. 1 Thess. ii. 19, which they could not be, if he did not know them from others.

II. I shall proceed to apply and improve the foregoing consideration, that in heaven we shall have a more full and glorious knowledge ; the use it may be of to us ; and the influence it ought to have upon us. And,

1. If heaven is a state wherein the souls of the righteous shall be blessed with such improved knowledge, and such noble intellectual pleasures, how careful should every one of us be to secure heaven to ourselves hereafter! Let us not rest in sin and ignorance, when we are capable of being exalted to such glory and happiness. O careless sinners! be stirred up to diligence, that you may be found of God at last in peace. O presumptuous sinners! take not the hope of heaven without the life of it. 1 John iii. 3.

2. If heaven is such a state of glorious knowledge, it should comfort Christians amidst present darkness and ignorance. How little do we know of God! as Job has it. Job xxvi. 14. How little do we know of his works; how little of another world! But there, every cloud and mist shall be taken away from our eyes. What the learned have sought for in vain here, shall be fully understood by Christians of the smallest capacities. They shall with ease and pleasure contemplate the sublimest truths.

3. If heaven is a state of such glorious knowledge, we should refer thither such things as now seem dark and mysterious to us. Let us shun all vain curiosity, all desires of knowing things before the time. This would be unprofitable to us, and displeasing to God. It was the ruin of our first parents. They who looked into the ark were struck dead. See our Lord's reply to Peter. John xxi. 21, 22.

4. It should encourage us in the way of Christ, and in the way to heaven, that we shall be blessed with such knowledge there. O what noble entertainments will this afford us in a happy eternity! How should we then run our race, when there is such a reward and crown for us at the end of it! 2 Tim. iv. 8.

5. Since we hope for such noble and intellectual pleasures in heaven, it should deter us from the present sordid pleasures of sin. Shall we wallow in such mire, who are designed for such glory and happiness! Is it becoming a soul, that is to contemplate for ever God and his wondrous works, to employ its thoughts now on unworthy objects, to fix its affections on earthly and perishing delights, to waste its time in vanity and folly? Surely, no: "having these promises," &c. 2 Cor. vii. 1. A sinful life and a heavenly hope are inconsistent with each other.

6. Since heaven is the place where we attain to the consummate knowledge of God, let us bear with them who, in some things, differ in opinion from ourselves. They will know better in heaven, and we shall know better too. In the mean time, let us all strive to be of Christ; to have the temper of Christ, the love, and humility, and forbearance of Christ. Let us be charitable and compassionate one toward another; nor let us suppose that we shall ever all think alike till we come to heaven, "where we shall know, even as we are known."

7. Since heaven is such a state of glorious knowledge, let us wish and long for it. Let our souls cry out, "O when shall we leave these dark abodes for the fair regions of light which are above? When shall we leave our mistakes, and doubts, and uncertainties, and be harassed with them no more for ever? When shall we no longer seek after knowledge and not find it? When shall that day of glory come, when we shall no more know in part, but know as we are known?"

Such as these should be our pious breathings and holy longings after that state of complete and satisfying knowledge in the other world.

THE HUMILIATION AND SUBSEQUENT GLORY OF CHRIST.

But we see Jesus, &c.—Heb. ii. 9.

THE subject of Christ crucified can never be unseasonable; but it is more particularly so at this season of the year, Easter, when a great part of the Christian world is employed in commemorating this important event. It is with a view to this, that I have selected the passage which I have now read over, in which we may observe,

I. The humiliation of Jesus Christ, “made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, that by the grace of God he might taste death for every man.” This,

1. Presupposes that, in one respect, he was higher than the angels. He is so, as the Son of God, chap. i. 5, 6, of the same essence, verse 3, self-existent, independent, eternal. Hence called Jehovah; Jer. xxiii. 6; the mighty God; Isa. ix. 6; the Word that was God; John i. 1; true God; 1 John v. 20; great God; Tit. ii. 13; Alpha and Omega, the Almighty. Rev. i. 8. He made the world. John i. 10; Col. i. 16, 17.

2. He was made a little lower than the angels, as to his condition; a man, a servant; Isa. xlii. 1; possessed a true body and a reasonable soul; was the child born; Isa. ix. 6; the Word was made flesh; John i. 14; was made of a woman; Gal. iv. 4; flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone; and but for a little while, living thirty-three years in the form of a servant; and was three days subject to the power of the grave.

3. And this “for the suffering of death.” The Godhead could not suffer, hence “made lower than the angels;” made man, in both parts, body and soul, that he might suffer in both for man. This he has done, and his sufferings were great; for,

1. His sufferings were universal, affecting every part of his frame; all his members, and senses.

2. They were continual; not by fits and starts, but constant; not a moment’s intermission: every moment on the rack till he died.

3. They were without help, without comfort. Heavenly consolation flowing into a man’s soul tends greatly to alleviate his sufferings: the martyrs shouted in the flames; but Jesus was forsaken of all, both of man, and of God the Father. Mark xiv. 27; xv. 34.

And as he suffered in his body, so he suffered in his soul. He suffered,

1. The wrath of God which was awfully impressed on his soul. The wrath of a king is as the roaring of a lion; Prov. xix. 12; but what is that to the wrath of offended Deity? Isa. liii. 10.

2. It was pure wrath, not any contrary mixture to allay it: no comfort from heaven or earth. “He spared him not.” Rom. viii. 32; Isa. lxiii. 3.

3. It was the whole of his wrath. It was poured out upon him to the last drop. Rev. xix. 15. This was the cup he deprecated, and the very prospect of drinking it made him sweat blood. Luke xxii. 44.

And he suffered to "death;" "tasted death," that is, actually died. His death was,

1. Violent: not natural, through old age, but in the prime of life. He was "cut off." Isa. liii. 8. He is said to "suffer death," and to be "put to death." 1 Pet. iii. 18.

2. Painful. It was many deaths contrived in one. The cross was a rack, as well as a gibbet. He was "poured out as water, and his bones were out of joint." Ps. xxii. 14—18.

3. Shameful. Inflicted only on the basest and vilest of men; upon slaves; and thus he was numbered with transgressors. Isa. liii. 12.

4. Cursed. Hence he is said to be a curse for us; "cursed is every one," &c. Gal. iii. 13, referring to Deut. xxi. 23.

5. Lingering. Not despatched at once, or after a few minutes' suffering; but endured three hours (some say six) of the most excruciating agony all the time he hung upon the cross. Luke xxiii. 33.

6. And all this suffering for "every man;" he being the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. 1 John ii. 1. Hence God is propitious to all; all may have their sins forgiven, all may be saved; and if all are not saved, it is because they will not repent, come to Christ, and believe in him. 2 Cor. v. 19—21. John v. 40.

II. The reward of his merit, as it respects himself. "Crowned," &c.

1. This was done in his resurrection from the dead, in which he was declared to be the Son of God, &c. Rom. i. 3, 4.

2. In his ascension: this was glorious and honourable. Ps. xlvii. 5, 6. Eph. iv. 8.

3. In his being sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Heb. i. 3; has obtained a name above every name; Phil. ii. 9; all power in heaven and earth is committed to him. Matt. xxviii. 18. The government of the world, and the church is upon his shoulder; Isa. ix. 6; and he is to be judge of all. John v. 22, 23.

III. The grand source and spring of the whole, the "grace of God." Our salvation is wholly owing to the free mercy and grace of God in Christ Jesus; not to any deserving of ours. It is altogether the effect of Divine love. John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 9, 10. It is in the way of mere grace and favour,

1. That Jesus humbled himself to death for us. 2 Cor. viii. 9.

2. That we are called to repentance, faith, holiness, and usefulness in the world, and in the church. Gal. i. 15.

3. That we are enabled to believe, in order to our salvation. Acts xviii. 27.

4. That we are pardoned and justified according to the "riches of his grace." Rom. iii. 24. Eph. i. 7. To conclude:

5. That we are finally saved, and put into possession of the heavenly inheritance. Eph. ii. 5. Zech. iv. 7.

1. Let us cherish humbling and contrite views of ourselves, on account of our sins, which led Jesus to endure such dreadful sufferings on our account. Let us look on him whom we have "pierced," &c. Zech. xii. 10.

2. While we entertain the most adoring thoughts of his love to us, let us yield to him the most entire obedience and love. 1 John iv. 19.

THE IMPORTANT QUESTION CONCERNING OUR LORD'S CHARACTER.

What think ye of Christ?—Matt. xxii. 42.

THESE are the words of our Lord addressed to the Pharisees. They were the greatest enemies of our Lord; always watching him, to entangle him in his "talk," asking him a variety of questions; but always found him too many for them on these occasions, putting them to silence. Our Lord, in his turn, asks them a question respecting himself as the Messiah, whose coming they professed to expect, saying, "What think ye of Christ?"

I shall consider,

I. What the scriptures say concerning Christ; and they speak of him,

1. As David's son. Rev. xxii. 16; the Son of man, John iii. 13; Matt. xxv. 31; the Child born, Isa. ix. 6; born of a woman, Gal. iv. 4; Man, Acts xvii. 31. 1 Tim. ii. 5; hence subject to all our sinless infirmities, Heb. v. 2, weariness, weakness, fatigue, sickness, hunger, thirst, and death itself.

2. As David's Lord, Ps. cx. 1; called Lord, Rom. i. 3. Luke ii. 11; God, Rom. ix. 5. 1 Tim. iii. 16. 2 Pet. i. 1. 1 John v. 20; and as such possessing all the essential attributes of Deity. Called the Glory of the Lord, Isa. xl. 5; Brightness of the Father's glory, Heb. i. 3. For proof of this, see the splendid miracles which he wrought in his own name, and by his own power.

3. As the Redeemer of the world, Job xix. 25. Thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Isa. xli. 14.

4. Man needed a Redeemer, being a slave to sin, Satan, the world, and the curse of the law. The redemption of the soul is precious. Ps. xlix. 8. Christ is our redemption. Gal. iv. 5. Redeemed by his blood, 1 Pet. i. 18, through which we are forgiven, Eph. i. 7, by which he has obtained eternal redemption for us. Heb. ix. 2. And so "the redeemed of the Lord shall return to Zion with songs," &c. Isa. li. 11.

5. As the Saviour of mankind: as he redeems by his blood, so he saves by his power. He came, not to destroy, Luke ix. 56; to save the lost, Luke xix. 10. The Saviour of the world, John iv. 42; exalted as a Prince and Saviour, Acts v. 31; just and powerful, Isa. xlv. 21; perfect, Heb. ii. 10; universal, Saviour of all, 1 Tim. iv. 10. Acts xiii. 47; a present Saviour, 2 Cor. vi. 2.

6. As our forerunner. He tarried forty days on earth after his resurrection, teaching and confirming his disciples in the faith of his resurrection which they were to preach to the world. Led them to Bethany, Luke xxiv. 50; while he blessed them, was parted from them and "a cloud received him," &c. Luke xxiv. 51; ascended far above all heavens, Eph. iv. 10; appears in the presence of God for us, Heb. ix. 24;

makes intercession for us, Heb. vii. 25 ; prepares mansions for us, John xiv. 2 ; sends down the Holy Ghost to prepare us for heaven, John xiv. 16.

7. As our Judge. Appointed to it, Acts x. 42 ; all judgment committed to him, John v. 22 ; he will sit upon his throne, Matt. xxv. 31 ; the judgment-seat is his, Rom. xi. 10. 2 Cor. v. 10 ; it is his great white throne, Rev. xx. 11 ; he is to come in the clouds, Rev. i. 7 ; and will be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, 2 Thess. i. 7.

Having noticed these things concerning Christ, permit me now to ask you, "What think ye of Christ?" And this is the

II. Part of the subject, the practical part of it. Perhaps you are ready to reply, "We ought to think very highly of him." Then,

1. Always entertain high and adoring thoughts of him, and worship him. The wise men from the East did so, Matt. ii. 11 ; the angels did so, Heb. i. 6 ; all the hosts of heaven, saints and angels combined, do so, Rev. vii. 9—12.

2. Let your best affections be directed to him. He is worthy, Rev. v. 12, 13. He first loved us, 1 John iv. 19 ; shed his blood to redeem us, Tit. ii. 14 ; and surely we ought to love him ; 2 Cor. v. 14, 15 ; and refusing to do so, we deserve the heaviest punishment. 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

3. Always dread to offend him. Beware of slighting his love. Deut. xxxii. 15. Such shall be lightly esteemed by him. 1 Sam. ii. 30. Grieve not his Spirit. Eph. iv. 30. Neglect not his salvation. Heb. ii. 3. Reject not his offers of mercy. Prov. i. 24—26. If we wilfully continue in ignorance, and refuse to obey his gospel, certain vengeance will follow. 2 Thess. i. 7—9.

4. Prepare to meet him ; be reconciled unto him ; sue for pardon, and rest not until you obtain it ; and have the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sin ; regeneration, by the renewal of the Holy Ghost, Tit. iii. 5, 6 ; an union of the soul with Christ by faith in him ; and so be one spirit with the Lord, 1 Cor. vi. 17 ; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, Eph. iii. 17. And then,

5. And lastly, expect the greatest blessings from him. For your hope is a glorious hope, Tit. ii. 13, including a glorified body, Phil. iii. 20, 21, a glorious kingdom, Matt. xxv. 34, a glorious crown, 1 Pet. v. 4, glorious company, Rev. vii. 9—12, glorious employment. Verses 10—12. The Christian's hope is the hope of glory. Col. i. 27. It is inconceivable, inexpressible, uninterrupted, and eternal ; an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. 2 Cor. iv. 17.

"O ye blest scenes of permanent delight !
Full above measure, lasting beyond bound !
Could ye, so rich in rapture, fear an end,
That ghastly thought would drink up all your joys,
And quite unparadise the realms of light."

PRAYER FOR A RIGHT DIRECTION OF THE HEART.

The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God.—2 Thess. iii. 5.

THE Thessalonians were an excellent people ; stood high in the esteem of St. Paul ; they had true faith, and it grew exceedingly, chap. i. 3,

while their love to each other abounded. No wonder he was so anxious for an interest in their prayers : chap. iii. 1, 2 ; and he in his turn prays for them in his text, " And the Lord," &c.

I. Direct your attention to the love of God.

Sometimes it means God's love to us ; and at others, our love to God : this last is the sense in which it is to be understood in the text ; and in directing your attention to it, I shall consider some of its principal characters.

1. It has its seat in the heart, not in word only, 1 John iii. 18, nor in mere professions, Tit. i. 16. Rev. iii. 1. It is shed abroad in the heart ; Rom. v. 5 ; hence the divine requirement, " My son, give me thy heart ;" Prov. xxiii. 26 ; and " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Matt. xxii. 37.

2. It will not admit of a rival. God is a jealous God, and will not give his glory to another. Isa. xlii. 8. He must be loved supremely : others may be loved, but it must be in subordination to the Lord. Matt. x. 37.

3. It is accompanied with humility : the Christian " is not puffed up," 1 Cor. xiii. 4 ; is little in his own eyes, Job. xlii. 6 ; " a worm " in his own estimation, " and no man," Ps. xxii. 6 ; " less than the least," &c. Eph. iii. 8 ; " clothed with humility," &c. 1 Pet. v. 5.

4. It principally consists in obedience. It is obedient love that pervades the heart. " Ye are my friends," said Christ to his disciples, " if ;" &c. John xv. 14. He loves the commandments of his Lord, Ps. cxix. 97 ; and has respect to them all. Ps. cxix. 6. They are his delight. Ps. cxix. 143. And St. John says, in his Second Epistle, ver. 6, " that this is love, that we walk after his commandments."

5. It is inflamed under the rod of correction. God often corrects his children ; there is a need for it ; it is for wise purposes. Heb. xii. 10. David found it so. Ps. cxix. 67. When the Lord strikes they cling to him. Job xiii. 15.

6. It is an active principle, exciting to every good word and work. It leads to the throne of the heavenly grace ; to the house of God ; to the Lord's table ; to the reading of the holy Scriptures ; to the bed of the sick and dying, &c. James i. 27 ; iii. 17.

II. The import of the prayer, " that the Lord may direct their hearts into the love of God ;" which implies,

1. That the heart of man has got a wrong direction, away from God, to the world, to self and sin. The heart is naturally opposed to God, and is at enmity with him. Rom. viii. 7. " Proud, haters of God." Rom. i. 30. Ps. lxxxi. 15.

2. It is not in the power of man to give his own heart a right direction : the work is too great for him to accomplish. Can he stop the sun in his course ? Can he pluck the stars from their orbits ? Can he calm the roaring of the sea ? Can he check the swelling tide, and say, " Hither shalt thou come, and no further ?" This is impossible : no more can he direct the current of his affections to the Lord. " It is not in man," &c. Jer. x. 23 ; he cannot enlighten his own mind ; cannot change his own heart, and direct his heart into the love of God. But,

3. The Lord can do it ; it is his work ; he that made the heart can

easily change it, and “make all things new.” He can stop the sun, &c. and bring back the full spring time of man’s affection to himself; and the Holy Ghost is the great agent in this work. Rom. v. 5. Hence the propriety of the prayer in the text, that the Lord would direct, &c.

4. And we are to pray for it. Paul here prays for it on the behalf of the Thessalonians; but it is necessary also that they should pray for themselves. Your ministers pray for you, but it is necessary that you should pray for yourselves; and your prayers, joined to theirs, will surely be successful. James v. 16. Matt. xviii. 19.

To conclude :

1. Let those who may have lost their first love pray for its restoration: this was the case with the Ephesians; Rev. ii. 5; and, like them, you must remember whence you have fallen; repent, and do the first works.

2. Let those who retain their love to the Lord endeavour to increase therein, that their love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, &c. Phil. i. 9. 10.

3. Let those whose hearts are yet estranged from God, and at enmity with him, ponder well their truly awful and alarming situation. They are “anathema.” 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

THE

VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

Yea, though I walk, &c.—Ps. xxiii. 4.

IN the beginning of this Psalm, the Psalmist contemplates the Lord in the character of a Shepherd, and claims him as his Shepherd: he regards himself as one of his sheep, and concludes that he shall receive from him every necessary supply. “I shall not want.” He acknowledges his kindness in making him to “lie down in the green pastures” of his ordinances, where he feeds to his soul’s content, beside the waters of divine consolation, flowing in those pure and untroubled streams proceeding from that river which makes glad the city of God. Ps. xlv. 4. That when he goes astray the Lord kindly restores him, and leads him in the “paths of righteousness,” in the way of holy obedience to his commands. In the text he expresses his strong confidence in God that he would be with him in the deepest trials, even in death itself. “Yea,” &c. In these words we have,

I. A case supposed, that we shall “walk through the valley of the shadow of death.”

1. This is a case not merely possible, and probable, but absolutely certain. It is not more certain that we live than that we shall die, &c. &c.

All antiquity proves it: one generation succeeds to another. Like our fathers, we are only sojourners here. 1 Chron. xxix. 15.

Daily observation confirms it. Men are continually going to their long home, while the mourners go about the streets. Eccl. xii. 5.

Our own feelings announce it: the pains we feel are so many fore-runners and monitors of our approaching end.

The word of God declares it. It is appointed. Heb. ix. 27. "I know," says Job, "that thou wilt bring me to death," &c. Job xxx. 23. "What man is he that liveth," &c. Ps. lxxxix. 48. And "dust thou art," &c. Gen. iii. 19.

2. The path-way out of time into eternity is a "valley;" to the wicked, dark and gloomy, and full of terror; to them it is the valley of the king of terrors, Job xviii. 14; to the righteous, of holy triumph, delight, and glorious expectation. Who can tell the pleasures they feel when within a few moments of the vision of God? They can sing, "O death!" &c. 1 Cor. xv. 55, 57.

3. Hence they are here said to "walk" in this valley, expressive of that divine calm they feel, serene and resigned to the will of God; while the wicked are all terror, distraction and despair. Prov. xiv. 32.

4. And to the righteous a mere "shadow," harmless and innocuous as a shadow, producing no real evil to the Christian; "the shadow of a sword cannot harm," &c. &c. Death is reckoned to the Christian as one of his blessings, 1 Cor. iii. 22; but to the wicked, it is the greatest possible evil; it finishes their day of grace, winds up the possibility of their salvation, seals their doom, and ushers them into eternal perdition. Their expectation perisheth, Prov. xi. 7; "shall be silent in darkness," 1 Sam. ii. 9; "shall be turned into hell," Ps. ix. 17; shall rain upon them fire and brimstone, Ps. xi. 6.

II. The Christian's feeling in relation to it. "I will fear no evil." There are many evils connected with death in certain circumstances, and which we should endeavour to be delivered from.

1. The terrors of a guilty conscience. "The arrows of the Almighty," Job vi. 4. "Terrors shall make afraid," Job xviii. 11. Driven from light into darkness. Job xviii. 18. Prov. xiv. 32. Casteth down to destruction. Ps. lxxiii. 18.

2. The impression of divine wrath upon the soul. Eph. v. 6. Col. ii. 6.

3. Despair of Divine mercy. "His mercy clean gone for ever; forgotten to be gracious; in anger shut up his tender mercies." Ps. lxxvii. 8, 9.

4. The loss of heaven, with all its exceeding and eternal weight of glory. This was the case with the rich man, Luke xvi. 23. The loss of the soul is inconceivably great. Mark viii. 36.

5. Eternal punishment. "Tribulation and anguish." Rom. ii. 9. Snares, fire, and brimstone. Ps. xi. 6. Taking vengeance, everlasting destruction. 2 Thess. i. 8, 9.

The real Christian fears none of these; for,

1. His heart is "sprinkled from an evil conscience" by the blood of Jesus. Heb. x. 22.

2. He is in the favour of God: his anger is turned away, Isa. xii. 1, and he stands in the grace of God. Rom. v. 2.

3. He has a well-grounded hope of heaven, 1 Pet. i. 3, 4, and rejoices in hope of the glory of God. Rom. v. 2.

4. The promise of a faithful God, that he shall have a crown of life. Rev. ii. 10. Shall inherit glory. Prov. iii. 35.

5. He has an earnest of it; the foretaste of his future felicity, the earnest of his inheritance. Eph. i. 14.

6. And "over such the second death shall have no power." Rev. xx. 6.

III. The reasons assigned why he will fear no evil ; because,

1. The Lord is with me. When the children of Israel were about to advance, Moses, knowing how much depended upon the presence of God, said, "If thy presence," &c. Ex. xxiii. 15. His presence, felt and enjoyed, cheers the otherwise gloomy valley of death. Jesus with him, he fears not to enter, and pass through it. He fears no evil.

2. His rod, which is the emblem of authority and power, Ps. ii. 9, protects him against the powers of darkness in a dying hour, and while upon his journey to the heavenly Canaan through the territories of the prince of the power of the air. Eph. ii. 2.

3. His staff, the promises of the gospel. 2 Pet. i. 4. These support the dying Christian in the hour of dissolution. One single promise is quite sufficient for this purpose, and we generally find that some one or other is impressed on the mind for this purpose, such as Rev. i. 17, 18. Luke xii. 32. John x. 28 ; xii. 26 ; xiv. 2, 3. For this he prays, John xvii. 22, 24.

Improvement :

1. How much to be envied is the state of the real Christian ! Well might Balaam exclaim, "Let me die," &c. Num. xxiii. 10.

Their life they do not envy, but they very much envy their death. Most willingly would they change circumstances with them in a dying hour.

2. How truly pitiable and deplorable is the death of a sinner, destitute of divine comfort, filled with remorse, overwhelmed with dreadful expectation ! "The wicked are driven away in their wickedness ; but the righteous has hope in his death." Prov. xiv. 32. While it is yet time, fly to the refuge provided for you in the wounds of a crucified Redeemer. There is no time to be lost ; death is at hand ; and there is "no device, no repentance in the grave," whither you are going.

GOD'S WILLINGNESS TO SAVE THE WORST OF SINNERS.

Say unto them, as I live, saith the Lord God, &c.—Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

THESE words were originally intended for God's ancient people, the Jews ; a people most singularly favoured of God, and as remarkable for their ingratitude and rebellion against God. He was under the necessity (so to speak) of punishing them by repeatedly bringing up their enemies against them ; and at last permitting them to be carried away into Babylon, where they suffered a long and painful captivity. There you might have seen them sitting by the streams of Babylon, hanging their harp upon the willows, subject to the scorn and derision of the heathen, who jeeringly asked them to sing one of the songs of Zion ; to which they could only reply, "How can we sing the songs of Zion in a strange land ?" Many of them felt their situation, and were much depressed.

concluding that their case was desperate, that what they were now suffering was but a prelude to some more dreadful calamity. In these circumstances God raised up Ezekiel, and sent him to them with the encouraging message of the text, "Say unto them," &c. Notice,

I. The character of the persons spoken of in the text, the "wicked." They are such as are,

1. Wicked in their principles and dispositions. Jer. xvii. 9.

2. In their actions: (see their character in Rom. i. 29—32, and 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10 :) actions which prove to a demonstration the evil propensities of their nature.

3. In short, this is the character of every unregenerated soul. Salvation is far from them; Ps. cxix. 155; and they are "estranged from the womb." Ps. lvi. 3.

4. The ways in which these persons walk are their own ways, of their own choosing and approving, preferring them to God's ways, which are pure, pleasant, and profitable. Prov. iii. 17.

5. They are called "evil ways," as they are sinful, Ezek. xxvi. 13, miserable, yielding no satisfaction, no peace to the soul. The way of peace they know not. Isa. lix. 8. No peace to the wicked. Isa. lvii. 20, 21. Dangerous, leading to destruction; Matt. vii. 13; the end of which is death. Prov. xiv. 12.

II. The merciful call in the text, "Turn ye, turn ye," &c. Man has departed from his God, given him the back and not the face; so the word implies; and the longer he stays away, the more difficult will be his return, if ever he does return. To turn is to alter our course, and direct our steps back to God; and this is to be done,

1. By true repentance. Acts iii. 19; xvii. 30. Christ exalted for this purpose; Acts iii. 51; which implies,

2. Conviction of sin, produced by the operation of the Holy Ghost. John xvi. 8, 9.

3. Deep contrition, compared to the sorrows of death, and the pains of hell, Ps. cxvi. 3; called the rending of the heart. Joel ii. 13.

4. An humble acknowledgment of it must not cover, but confess. Prov. xxviii. 13. "Woe unto us." Lam. v. 11. To be ashamed and blush. Ezra ix. 6. "If we confess," &c. 1 John i. 8, 9.

5. A total renunciation of sin. The evil of our doings must be put away. Isa. i. 16, 17. Every wicked way and evil thought must be forsaken. Isa. lv. 7. Every transgression by which we have transgressed must be cast away. Ezek. xviii. 31, 32. "Turn ye, turn ye," &c. the text.

6. By prayer. In this way we are to draw nigh unto God. Ps. lxxiii. 28. "If we draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us." James iv. 8. It must be with the heart. Isa. xxix. 13. Through Christ, the "better hope." Heb. vii. 19. It must be with the whole heart. Ps. cxix. 2. We are to come boldly to a throne of grace. Heb. iv. 16. "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask," &c. Matt. xxi. 22.

7. By faith in Christ Jesus as our Saviour, and the "way" to the Father. It is by grace we are saved, but also through faith. Eph. ii. 8. It is he that liveth and believeth in Christ, &c. John xi. 25, 26. It is by faith we are justified, and find access unto God's favour; Rom. v. 1, 2; and that we are sanctified. Acts xxvi. 18.

III. Motives in order to engage our return.

1. We may return : there is a possibility of it. God has not laid any of the human race under an absolute impossibility of salvation, else he would not say in the text, "Why will ye die?" The most ample provision is made for all. Heb. ii. 9.

2. It is the will and pleasure of God that we should return. He wills all to be saved, to come to repentance, 2 Pet. iii. 9 ; invites all, Isa. lv. 1. Rev. xxii. 17. Rom. x. 13.

3. He declares he has "no pleasure in the death of the sinner;" he disclaims it, although some men say he has ; he not only declares it, but he confirms it by an oath : "As I live," &c. the text.

4. Hence the propriety of the question in the text, "Why will ye die?" As if he would say, I do not will it ; I have not decreed it. I have provided a way for your escape, for your return ; have given you grace to assist your return. I invite your return, and I am willing to receive you upon your return. "What could have been done more?" &c. Isa. v. 3, 4. Therefore, "Why will ye die?"

5. The Lord here disclaims being the cause of any man's destruction, and lays the blame of his ruin at his own door ; clearly shows that his destruction is entirely owing to himself ; to his love of sin ; his abuse of the grace of God ; to his neglect of the means of grace ; the opportunities of salvation ; and to his avoidable and obstinate unbelief. Mark xvi. 16. "Why then will ye die?" Why prefer sin to holiness, Satan to God, misery to happiness, destruction to salvation, death to life, hell to heaven ? "Why will ye die?" Why act so unreasonably, so foolishly, so dangerously ? Let not Satan and your own heart deceive you any longer, but begin this hour to return. Imitate the example of the prodigal son ; with him arise and return to your Father, and your God ; and of you he will joyfully say, "This, my son, who was dead, is alive ; he was lost, and is found."

6. And lastly. Let those who have returned never go back again, but "hold on their way;" Job xvii. 9 ; and in due time they shall reap, if they faint not. Gal. vi. 9. Rom. ii. 7.

THE DEATH OF THE WISE MAN AND THE FOOL.

And how dieth the wise man ? As the fool.—Ecc. ii. 16.

DEATH was unknown until sin entered into the world. If man had never sinned, he had never died ; but now death hath passed upon all men, for all have sinned. The awful sentence not only affected our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the first instance, but all his posterity. It is appointed to man to die ; and it is very properly asked, "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?" And in the text, "How dieth the wise man ? As the fool." Describe.

1. The fool's character ; and

1. He is one that makes a "mock at sin;" Prov. xiv. 9 ; ignorant of its nature, as opposed to the goodness and holiness of God ; its ten-

dency to make men wretched; and often treats its demerits with indifference, if not scorn; they hate divine knowledge, Prov. i. 22, and despise wisdom and instruction. Prov. i. 7.

2. He is an atheist. Whatever moral restraint may be upon his conduct, it is not the effect of the fear of God, but springs from his education, or a regard to the good opinion of his fellow-men. If not addicted to the open vices of the age in which he lives, he indulges in the evil propensities of the heart. Ps. xiv. 1; liii. 1.

3. He is a secure worldling; Luke xii. 20; seeks all his happiness in earthly enjoyments; is diligent in the pursuit of them; dreaming of a long life, while just on the brink of eternity; altogether heedless of the soul, and its eternal concerns. Well might Moses exclaim, "O that they were wise!" &c. Deut. xxxii. 29.

4. He walks in darkness, the darkness of sin, error, and death. Darkness hath blinded, &c. 1 John ii. 11. Full of darkness. Matt. vi. 23. For whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. Jude, verse 13.

II. The wise man's character; and,

1. He is taught of God; Isa. liv. 13; the knowledge of God, of his law, of himself, as a transgressor of that law; of the love of God, in the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ; of salvation, by the remission of sin. Luke i. 77.

2. He builds his house upon a rock. Places all his dependence for salvation upon the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ: he does all the good he can, in every possible way, but places no dependence upon it; he knows that "by the deeds of the law," &c. Rom. iii. 28, and that "we are justified freely by grace." Rom. iii. 24. Thus circumstanced, the rain may descend, the floods come, and the winds blow; but in vain; the building is secure; he is upon the rock. Matt. vii. 24.

3. He places his affections on heavenly things. He knows that all earthly things are fluctuating and changeable, but that Christ and heavenly things are durable and lasting, and that these alone can give permanent satisfaction and happiness to the immortal soul. Hence he can say, "Whom have I in heaven," &c. Ps. lxxiii. 25.

III. The end of both the "wise man" and the "fool." They die; in this respect there is no difference; the one dies as well as the other; but in other respects there is a very great difference, as it regards the manner and circumstances of their death. For,

1. The wise man dies in peace, Ps. xxxvii. 37; he is reconciled to God, Col. i. 21, 22. The enmity of his heart is slain, and the love of God fills and reigns in his heart. Rom. v. 1. The Saviour's legacy is his happy enjoyment, John xiv. 27; and with this peace he is filled, Rom. xv. 13; "the peace of God, that passeth," &c. Phil. iv. 7. He follows after peace with all men, and holiness. Heb. xii. 14.

Not so the fool: he dies at enmity with God, Rom. viii. 7; he has God for his enemy, who shall "take him away in his wrath;" Ps. lviii. 9; swallow him up, Ps. xxi. 9; "for his wrath is revealed," &c. Rom. i. 18; "no peace," &c. Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

2. The wise man dies happy, Rev. xiv. 13; his death is precious in God's sight, Ps. cxvi. 15; he has hope in his death; the hope of a glo-

rious immortality, 1 Pet. i. 3, 4 ; of being with his Saviour, John xiv. 2, 3 ; and shall be for ever with the Lord. 1 Thess. iv. 17.

Not so the fool : he dies miserable, forsaken of God, without God, without hope, Eph. ii. 12 ; his expectation perishes, Prov. xi. 7 ; he shall lie down in sorrow, Isa l. 11.

3. The wise man dies triumphant. He "is more than conqueror;" Rom. viii. 37 ; triumphing over the world, sin, Satan and death. 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. To such, death has lost its sting ; for the "sting of death is sin;" but through faith in the blood of Christ, his sin is pardoned, his guilt removed, his soul regenerated ; and thus death is disarmed ; he is no longer an enemy ; he wears an angel's face ; and the "wise man" fears him no longer, but hails him as his deliverer from the pains of this mortal life. Rev. i. 17, 18.

Not so the fool : he is forced away ; Prov. xiv. 32 ; unwilling to go ; afraid to meet God, whose law he has broken, whose authority he has rejected, whose goodness he has despised, whose mercies he has abused, whose dying love he has ungratefully slighted ; he is afraid to meet that God who declares that the wicked shall not go unpunished. Prov. xi. 21. Isa. xiii. 11.

4. The dying day of the "wise man" is his coronation day ; he goes to be crowned, to receive the crown of glory, 1 Pet. v. 4 ; a crown of righteousness, 2 Tim. iv. 8 ; a crown of life, Rev. ii. 10 ; and with this crown there is connected a kingdom, to which he is an heir, and which is promised to him, James ii. 5 ; it is prepared for him, Matt. xxv. 34 ; an entrance shall be ministered into it, 2 Pet. i. 11 ; it is his Father's good pleasure to give it, Luke xii. 32 ; he is appointed to it by Christ, Luke xxii. 29 ; it cannot be moved, Heb. xii. 28 ; the saints are to take it and possess it for ever and ever. Dan. vii. 22. The wise man was constituted heir to this crown and kingdom upon his receiving Christ by faith. He was then constituted a child of God, and an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ, Rom. viii. 15—17 ; and when he leaves this world, he goes to take possession of it as his rightful inheritance, a right bestowed upon him through faith in the atoning blood of Christ. Hence St. Paul could triumphantly say, "I have fought the good fight," &c. 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

Not so the fool : the day of his death is the day of his execution ; he has long been under the sentence of condemnation ; "condemned already." John iii. 18. And at death the dreadful sentence of the law takes its full effect. He is delivered over to the tormentors, to be confined in the prison of hell. Luke xvi. 23. Ps. ix. 17 ; to be punished with everlasting destruction, 2 Thess. i. 9. There the worm never dies, nor is the fire ever quenched, Isa. lxvi. 24. The smoke of their torment shall ascend for ever and ever. Rev. xiv. 11.

How awful is the state of such persons ! Let them repent, and return to God, before the sentence of the law is executed upon them : they may yet live Acts xvi. 31.

A COLLECTION OF THE PROPHECIES

WHICH CONCERN THE CALLING OF THE JEWS, AND THE GLORY THAT SHALL
BE IN THE LATTER DAYS.

I. THE Jews shall be gathered from all parts of the earth where they are now scattered, and brought home into their own land. For this, see Isa. xi. 11; xxvii. 12, 13; xliii. 5, 6; xlix. 11, 12; lx. 4.

Compare Jer. iii. 18; xvi. 14, 15; xxiii. 3; xxx. 10; xxxi. 7, 8; xxxii. 37; also Hos. xi. 10, 11. Zeph. iii. 10. Zech. viii. 7, 8; x. 8—10.

II. They shall be carried by the Gentiles unto their place, who shall join themselves with the Jews, and become the Lord's people. Isa. xlix. 22; xiv. 12; lx. 9; lxvi. 19, 20; ii. 2—4.

Compare Jer. iii. 17; xvi. 19. Ezek. xlvi. 22, 23. Mich. v. 3. Zech. ii. 11; viii. 20—23.

III. Great miracles shall be wrought when Israel is restored; as formerly, when they were brought out of Egypt, viz.

1. Drying up the river Euphrates. Isa. xi. 15, 16. Zech. x. 11. Rev. xvi. 12. Hos. ii. 15. Micah vii. 15.

2. Causing rivers to flow in desert places. Isa. xlviii. 20, 21; xliii. 9, 20.

3. Giving the prophets. Isa. lxvi. 18—21. Hosea xii. 9, 10.

4. The Lord Christ himself shall appear at the head of them. Isa. xxxv. 8; lii. 12; lviii. 8. Hosea i. 10, 11. Micah ii. 12, 13.

IV. The Jews being restored, and converted to the faith of Christ, shall be formed into a state, and have judges and counsellors over them, as formerly: the Lord Christ himself being their King, who shall then be acknowledged King over all the earth. Isa. i. 26; lx. 17. Compare Jer. xxiii. 4; xxx. 8, 9, 21. Hosea iii. 5. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 24, 25. Isa. liv. 5. Obad. v. 21. Zech. xiv. 5, 9. Ps. xxii. 27, 28.

V. They shall have the victory over all their enemies, and all kings and nations of the earth shall submit unto them. For which see Isa. xi. 13, 14; xli. 14—16; xlix. 23; lx. 12; xxv. 10—12. Joel iii. 7/8, 19, 20. Obad. v. 17, 18. Mich. iv. 6—8; 12, 13; v. 5—7; vii. 16, 17. Zech. ii. 13; ix. 13—15; x. 5, 6; xii. 6. Num. xxiv. 17. Isa. xlix. 23; lx. 10—16; lxvi. 19, 20.

VI. The Jews restored shall live peaceably, without being divided into two nations, or contending with one another any more. Isa. xi. 13, 14; xiv. 1, 2. Jer. iii. 11. Ezek. xxxvii. 21, 22. Hosea i. 11.

1. They shall be very numerous, and multiply greatly. Isa. xxvii. 6; xlv. 3, 4; xlix. 18—21; liv. 1—3; lxi. 9. Jer. xxiii. 3; xxx. 18—20; xxxi. 27. Ezek. xix; xxxiv. 11; xxxvi. 38, 39.

2. They shall have great peace, safety, and outward temporal prosperity. Isa. xxxii. 16—18; xxxiii. 24; liv. 13—17; lx. 18, 21. Jer. xxiii. 3—6; xxx. 10; xxxii. 34—41; xxxiii. 6—9; 1. 19, 20. Joel iii. 17, 18; Micah vii. 18—20. Zeph. iii. 13. Zech. iii. 9, 10.

3. They shall be very glorious, and a blessing in the whole earth. Isa. xix. 24, 25; lxi. 9. Jer. xxxiii. 9. Ezek. xxxiv. 26. Zeph. iii. 19, 20. Zech. viii. 13.

VII. The land of Judea shall be made eminently fruitful; like a paradise, or the garden of God. Isa. xxix. 17; xxiv. 1, 2, 7, 9; li. 3, 16; liv. 11—13; lv. 12, 13; lx. 17; lxv. 17, 25. Ezek. xxxiv. 26, 27; xxxvi. 37; Joel iii. 18. Amos ix. 13, 14.

VIII. Jerusalem shall be rebuilt, and, after the full restoration of the Jews, shall never be destroyed, nor infested with enemies any more. Isa. lii. 1; xxvi. 1; lx. 18; xxxiii. 6. Joel iii. 17. Obad. v. 17. Zech. xiv. 10, 11. Jer. xxxi. 38—40. Ezek. xxxviii. 11.

IX. A little before the time of the Jews' call and conversion, there shall be great wars, confusion, and desolation, throughout all the earth. Isa. xxxiv. throughout. Joel iii. 1, 10. Zeph. iii. 8, 9. Ezek. xxviii. 25, 26. Hag. ii. 21—23. Jer. xxx. 7—10. 2 Chron. xv. 3—7.

So that we may say, as Balaam did, prophesying of that very time, "Alas! who shall live when God doth this?" Num. xxiv. 23.

A COLLECTION

OF THE

NAMES AND TITLES GIVEN TO JESUS CHRIST.

-
- ✓ ADAM, 1 Cor. xv. 45.
 Advocate, 1 John ii. 1.
 Amen, Rev. iii. 14.
 Angel, Isa. lxiii. 9; Mal. iii. 1.
 Ancient of Days, Dan. vii. 22.
 Anointed, Ps. ii. 2; xlv. 7.
 Apostle, Heb. iii. 1.
 Apple tree, Cant. ii. 3.
 Author and finisher of faith, Heb. xii. 2.
 Babe, Luke ii. 16.
 Beginning of the Creation of God, Rev. iii. 14.
 Begotten of the Father, John i. 14.
 Beloved, Cant. i. 13. Eph. i. 6.
 Bishop, 1 Pet. ii. 25.
 Blessed, 1 Tim. vi. 15.
 Branch, Zech. iii. 8.
 Brazen serpent, John iii. 14.
 Bread of life, John vi. 48—51.
 ✓ Bridegroom, Matt. ix. 15.
 Bright morning star, Rev. xxii. 16.
 Brightness of the Father's glory, Heb. i. 3. ✓
 Bundle of Myrrh, Cant. i. 13.
 Camphire, Cant. i. 14.
 Captain, Josh. v. 14; Heb. ii. 10.
 Child, Isa. ix. 6.
 Chosen, Matt. xii. 18; Luke xxiii. 35.
 Christ, Matt. i. 16; ii. 4.
 Consolation of Israel, Luke ii. 25.
 Corner-stone, Eph. ii. 20; 1 Pet. ii. 7.
 Covenant, Isa. xlii. 6.
 Counsellor, Isa. ix. 6.
 ✓ Covert, Isa. xxxii. 2.
 ✓ Creator, Isa. xliii. 15.
 Creditor, Luke vii. 41.
 Cyrus, Isa. xlv. 1.
 David, Jer. xxx. 9; Ex. xxxvii. 24, 25; Hos. iii. 5.
 Day's-man, Job ix. 33.
 Day-star, 2 Pet. i. 10.
 Deliverer, Rom. xi. 26.
 Desire of all nations. Hag. ii. 7.
 Dew, Hos. xiv. 5.
 Diadem, Isa. lxii. 3.
 Door of sheep, John x. 7.
 Eagle, Deut. xxxii. 11.
 Elect, Isa. xlii. 1.
 Emmanuel, Matt. i. 23.
 Ensign, Isa. xi. 10.
 Eternal life, 1 John v. 20.
 ✓ Everlasting Father, Isa. ix. 6.
 Express image, &c. Heb. i. 3.
 Faithful witness, Rev. i. 5; iii. 14; xix. 11.
 Fatted calf, Luke xv. 23.
 Father of eternity, Isa. ix. 6.
 Feeder, Isa. xl. 11.
 Fir-tree, Hos. xiv. 8.
 First-begotten, Rev. i. 5.
 First-fruits, 1 Cor. xv. 23.
 First and last, Rev. ii. 8.
 Flesh, John i. 14.
 Foundation, Isa. xxviii. 16.
 Fountain, Zech. xiii. 1.
 Forerunner, Heb. vi. 20.
 Friend of sinners, Matt. xi. 19.
 Gift of God, 2 Cor. ix. 15.
 Glory of God, Isa. xl. 5.
 Glorious Lord, Isa. xxxiii. 21.
 God, John i. 1; Rom. ix. 5; 1 Tim. iii. 10; 1 John v. 20.
 Gold, Cant. v. 11.
 Golden altar, Rev. viii. 3.
 Governor, Matt. ii. 6.
 Gracious, 1 Pet. ii. 3.
 Guide, Ps. xlviii. 14. ✓
 Habitation, Ps. xci. 9.
 Harmless, Heb. vii. 26.
 Head of the Church, Col. i. 18.
 ✓ Heir of all things, Heb. i. 2.
 Help, Ps. xxxiii. 20; xl. 17.
 Heritage, Isa. lviii. 14.
 Highest, Ps. xviii. 13; Luke i. 32.
 High priest, Heb. iii. 1; vii. 1.
 Most High, Luke viii. 28.
 Holy One of God, Mark i. 24.
 Holy One of Israel, Isa. xli. 14.
 Holy Child, Acts iv. 30.
 Honey-comb, Cant. iv. 11.
 Hope, Acts xxviii. 20; 1 Tim. i. 1.
 Horn of Salvation, Ps. xviii. 2.
 Husband, Isa. liv. 5; Jer. xxxi. 32.
 I am, Ex. iii. 14; John viii. 58.
 Jacob, Isa. xli. 8; xlv. 1, 5.
 Jah, Ps. lxviii. 4.
 Jehovah, Isa. xxvi. 4; xl. 3.
 Jerusalem, Cant. vi. 4.
 Jesus, Matt. i. 21; 1 Thess. i. 10.
 Image of God, Heb. i. 3.
 Immanuel, Isa. vii. 14.
 Immortal, 1 Tim. i. 17.
 Inheritance, Ezek. xlv. 28.
 Invisible, 1 Tim. i. 17.
 Israel, Isa. xlv. 21; xlix. 3.
 Judah, Rev. v. 5.
 Judge, Mich. v. 1; Acts. x. 42.
 King, Matt. xxi. 5; xxv. 34.
 Ladder, Gen. xxviii. 12.

Lamb, John i. 29; Rev. v. 6.
 Lawgiver, Isa. xxxiii. 22; James iv. 12.
 Leader, Isa. lv. 4.
 Light, John i. 9; viii. 12; xii. 46.
 Life, John xiv. 6.
 Lion of the tribe of Judah, Rev. v. 5.
 Living God, 1 Tim. iii. 15.
 Long-suffering, Ex. xxxiv. 6.
 Lord, Rom. i. 3; Rev. xvii. 14.
 Lovely, Cant. v. 16.
 Man, Acts xvii. 31; 1 Tim. ii. 5.
 Master, Matt. viii. 19; xxiii. 6.
 Mediator, 1 Tim. ii. 5.
 Melchisedec, Heb. vii. 1.
 Merciful, Heb. ii. 17.
 Messenger, Mal. ii. 7; iii. 1.
 Messiah, Dan. ix. 25; John i. 41.
 Michael, Dan. xii. 1; Rev. xii. 7.
 Mighty God, Isa. ix. 6; lxiii. 1.
 Minister, Heb. viii. 2.
 Morning star, Rev. ii. 28; xxii. 16.
 Moses, Acts iii. 22.
 Nazarite, Matt. i. 23.
 Offspring of David, Rev. xxii. 16.
 Only-begotten, John i. 14.
 Ointment, Cant. i. 3.
 Passover, 1 Cor. v. 7.
 Plant of renown, Ezek. xxxiv. 29.
 Potentate, 1 Tim. vi. 15.
 Prince, Acts iii. 15; v. 31.
 Prophet, Luke iv. 19; Acts iii. 22.
 Propitiation, 1 John ii. 2; iv. 10.
 Power of God, 1 Cor. i. 24.
 Purifier, Mal. iii. 3.
 Physician, Matt. ix. 12.
 Polished shaft, Isa. xl. 2.
 Priest, Heb. iv. 14; vii. 26.
 Ransom, 1 Tim. ii. 6.
 Reaper, Rev. xiv. 15.
 Redeemer, Isa. lix. 20; lx. 16.
 Resurrection, John xi. 25.
 Refiner, Mal. iii. 3.
 Refuge, Isa. xxv. 4.
 Righteousness, Jer. xxiii. 6.
 Rock, Deut. xxxii. 15; 1 Cor. x. 4.
 Rod and branch, Isa. xi. 1.
 Root of David, Rev. xxii. 16.

Roe and hart, Cant. ii. 9.
 Rose of Sharon, Cant. ii. 1.
 Ruler in Israel, Mich. v. 2.
 Sacrifice, Eph. v. 2.
 Salvation, Luke ii. 30.
 Samaritan, Luke x. 33.
 Sanctification, 1 Cor. i. 30.
 Sanctuary, Isa. viii. 14.
 Seed of Abraham, Gal. iii. 29.
 Seed of David, 2 Tim. ii. 8.
 Seed of the woman, Gen. iii. 15.
 Second man, 1 Cor. xv. 47.
 Servant, Isa. xlii. 1. 19; xlv. 21.
 Shepherd, John x. 11; Heb. xiii. 20.
 Shield, Gen. xv. 1; Ps. xviii. 35.
 Shiloh, Gen. xlix. 10.
 Solomon, Cant. iii. 7; viii. 11, 12.
 Son of God, Matt. iv. 3; viii. 29.
 Son of Man, Matt. viii. 20.
 Sower, Matt. xiii. 3.
 Spirit, 1 Cor. xv. 45. Heb. ix. 14.
 Stone refused, Matt. xxi. 42.
 Strength of Israel. 1 Sam. xv. 29.
 Strong God, Ps. lxxxix. 8; Rev. xviii. 8.
 Substance, Heb. x. 34.
 Sun of righteousness, Mal. iv. 2.
 Surety, Heb. vii. 22.
 Sharp sword, Isa. xlix. 2.
 Tabernacle, Heb. viii. 2; ix. 11.
 Teacher, John iii. 2.
 Temple, Mark xiv. 58.
 Testator, Heb. ix. 16, 17.
 Treasure, Luke xii. 33.
 Tree of life, Rev. ii. 7.
 Truth, John xiv. 6.
 Vine, John xv. 1.
 Wall of fire, Zech. ii. 5.
 Way, Isa. xxxv. 8; John xiv. 6.
 Well of living water, Cant. iv. 15.
 Wedding garment, Matt. xxii. 12.
 Wisdom of God, 1 Cor. i. 24.
 Witness, Rev. i. 5; iii. 14.
 Wonderful, Isa. ix. 6; xxviii. 29.
 Word of God, Rev. xix. 13.
 Worthy, Heb. iii. 3; Rev. v. 12.
 Yesterday, to-day, for ever, Heb. xiii. 8.

250
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A COLLECTION

OF THE

APPELLATIONS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH OF GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES.

ADOPTED sons, Gal. iv. 5.
 Angels, Luke xx. 36.
 Assembly of saints, Heb. x. 25.
 Believers, Acts v. 14.
 Beloved of God, Ps. xli. 5; cviii. 6.
 Blessed, Ps. ii. 12; xxxii. 1.
 Blameless, Phil. ii. 15.
 Body of Christ, Eph. i. 23.
 Branches of righteousness, John xv. 5.

Brethren, Rom. viii. 29; xii. 1.
 Bride, Rev. xxi. 2, 9; xxii. 17.
 Building of God, 1 Cor. iii. 9.
 Called, Isa. lxii. 12; Rom. viii. 28.
 Candlestick, Rev. i. 12; ii. 5.
 Cedars, Ps. xcii. 12. Ezek. xxxi. 8.
 Children of the kingdom, Matt. xiii. 38.
 Christ, 1 Cor. xii. 12.
 Christians, Acts xi. 26; 1 Pet. iv. 16.

- Church of God, 1 Cor. i. 2.
 Circumcision, Phil. iii. 3.
 City of God, Heb. xii. 22; Rev. iii. 12.
 Citizens, Eph. ii. 19.
 Comely, Cant. i. 5.
 Companions, Ps. xlv. 14; Cant. i. 7.
 Complete, Col. ii. 10.
 Congregation of saints, Ps. cxlix. 1.
 Contrite, Isa. lviii. 15; lxvi. 2.
 Converts, Isa. i. 27.
 Corner-stones, Ps. cxliv. 12.
 Daughter of the king, Ps. xlv. 13.
 Dead in Christ, 1 Thess. iv. 16.
 Dearly beloved, Jer. xii. 7.
 Delights, Cant. vii. 6.
 Dew, Ps. cx. 3; Mich. v. 7.
 Disciples, Isa. viii. 16; Matt. v. 1.
 Dove, Cant. ii. 14; v. 2.
 Eagles, Ps. ciii. 5; Isa. xl. 31.
 Elect, Isa. xlv. 4; Matt. xxiv. 22.
 Election, Rom. ix. 11; xi. 5, 7.
 Escaped, Isa. xlv. 20; 2 Pet. i. 4.
 Excellent, Ps. xvi. 3; Prov. xii. 26.
 Fair, Cant. i. 15; ii. 10; iv. 10.
 Faithful, Eph. i. 1; Col. i. 2.
 Family of God, Eph. iii. 15.
 Fearful, Isa. xxxv. 4.
 Fig-trees, Cant. ii. 13.
 First-fruits, James i. 18.
 Flock of God, Acts xx. 28.
 First-born, Heb. xii. 23.
 Fold of Christ, John x. 16.
 Followers of God, Eph. v. 1.
 Fountain, Cant. iv. 12.
 Freeman, 1 Cor. vii. 22.
 Friends of God, James ii. 23.
 Fruitful, Col. i. 10.
 Fulness of Christ, Eph. i. 23.
 Garden enclosed, Cant. iv. 12.
 Gathered, Isa. lvi. 8.
 General assembly, Heb. xii. 23.
 Generation of the upright, Ps. cxv. 2.
 Glory of God, Isa. xlvi. 13.
 Glorious, Ps. xlv. 13.
 Grapes, Hosea ix. 10.
 Habitation of God, Eph. ii. 22.
 Heirs of God, Rom. viii. 17.
 Heritage of God, Jer. xii. 7.
 Hidden ones, Ps. lxxxiii. 3.
 Holy, 1 Cor. iii. 17; Eph. i. 4.
 House of God, 1 Tim. iii. 15.
 Humbly, Ps. ix. 12; xxxiv. 2.
 Husbandry of God, 1 Cor. iii. 9.
 Image of God, Rom. viii. 29.
 Inhabitants of Zion, Isa. xii. 6.
 Israel of God, Gal. vi. 16.
 Jacob, Ps. xiv. 7; cxlvii. 19.
 Jerusalem above, Gal. iv. 20. Heavenly, Heb. xii. 22. Holy, Rev. xxi. 10.
 Jewels of the Lord, Mat. m. 17.
 Joy of the whole earth, Ps. xlviii. 2.
 Justified, Acts xiii. 39.
 Kings, Rev. i. 6; v. 10.
 Kingdom of heaven, Matt. xiii. 38.
 Lambs, Isa. xl. 11; John xxi. 15.
 Lamb's wife, Rev. xxi. 9.
 Light of the world, Matt. v. 14.
 Lily among thorns, Cant. ii. 2.
 Little ones, Zech. xiii. 7.
 Lively stones, 1 Pet. ii. 5.
 Lot of God's inheritance, Deut. xxxii. 9.
 Love or his Love, Cant. iv. 7.
 Lowly, Ps. cxxxviii. 6; Prov. iii. 34.
 Members of Christ, Eph. v. 30.
 Merciful, Matt. v. 7.
 Mighty, Ps. cxii. 2; Acts xviii. 24.
 Mount Zion, Heb. xii. 22.
 Mourners, Isa. lviii. 18.
 Needy, Ps. ix. 18; Isa. xxv. 4; xli. 17.
 Obedient, 1 Pet. i. 14.
 Palaces, Ps. xlv. 15; xlviii. 3. 13.
 Palm-trees, Ps. xcii. 12; Cant. vii. 8.
 Peaceable, Gen. xxxiv. 21.
 Peculiar people, 1 Pet. ii. 9.
 Perfect, 2 Tim. iii. 17; Heb. xii. 23.
 Pilgrims, Heb. xi. 13.
 Pillar of truth, 1 Tim. iii. 15.
 Plants, Ps. cxliv. 12; Cant. iv. 13.
 Poor, Matt. v. 3; xi. 5.
 Portion of the Lord, Deut. xxxii. 9.
 Precious, Ps. cxvi. 15; Isa. xliii. 4.
 Princes, 1 Sam. ii. 8; Ps. xlv. 16.
 Pure in heart, Matt. v. 8.
 Ransomed, Isa. xlv. 10; li. 11.
 Redeemed, Isa. li. 11; lxii. 12.
 Sanctified, 1 Cor. i. 2; vi. 11.
 Saved of the Lord, Deut. xxxiii. 29.
 Sheep, John x. 3, 4; xxi. 16.
 Sincere, Phil. i. 10.
 Stones, 1 Pet. ii. 5.
 Sister, Spouse, Cant. iv. 12.
 Sons of God, Rom. viii. 14.
 Spiritual, Gal. vi. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 5.
 Stars, Ps. cxlviii. 3; Rev. iii. 1.
 Strangers, Ps. xxxix. 12; cxix. 9.
 Temple of God, 1 Cor. iii. 16.
 Treasure of God, Ps. cxxxv. 4.
 Vessels of mercy, Rom. ix. 23.
 Vineyard, Isa. v. 7; xxvii. 2.
 Virgins, Jer. xxxi. 4; Rev. xiv.
 Undeified, Cant. v. 2; vi. 9.
 Upright, Ps. xi. 7; xxxvii. 37.
 Wise men, 1 Cor. vi. 5.
 Watchman, Isa. lii. 8; lxii. 6.
 Wayfaring-men, Isa. xxxv. 8.
 Woman, Rev. xii. 1.
 Worshipers, Heb. x. 2.
 Worthy to walk with Christ, Rev. iii. 4.
 Written in heaven, Heb. xii. 23.
 Zealous of good works, Tit. ii. 14.
 Zion, Ps. lxxix. 35; lxxvi. 2; lxxvii. 2.

THE LORD'S PRAYER ILLUSTRATED.

OUR FATHER. Isa. lxiii. 16.

1. By right of creation. Mal. ii. 10.
2. By bountiful provision. Ps. cxlv. 16.
3. By gracious adoption. Eph. i. 5.

WHO ART IN HEAVEN. 1 Kings viii. 43.

1. The throne of thy glory. Isa. lxvi. 1.
2. The portion of thy children. 1 Pet. i. 4.
3. The temple of thy angels. Isa. vi. 1.

HALLOWED BE THY NAME. Ps. cxv. 1.

1. By the thoughts of our hearts. Ps. lxxxvi. 11.
2. By the words of our lips. Ps. li. 15.
3. By the work of our hands. 1 Cor. x. 31.

THY KINGDOM COME. Ps. cx. 2.

1. Of providence to defend us. Ps. xvii. 8.
2. Of grace to refine us. 1 Thess. v. 23.
3. Of glory to crown us. Col. iii. 4.

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. Acts xxi. 14.

1. Towards us, without resistance. 1 Sam. iii. 18.
2. By us, without compulsion. Ps. cxix. 36.
3. Universally without exception. Luke i. 6.
4. Eternally, without declension. Ps. cxix. 93.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD.

1. Of necessity, for our bodies. Prov. xxx. 8.
2. Of eternal life, for our souls. John vi. 34.

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES. Ps. xxv. 11.

1. Against the commands of thy law. 1 John iii. 4.
2. Against the grace of thy gospel. 1 Tim. i. 13.

AS WE FORGIVE THEM THAT TRESPASS AGAINST US. Matt. vi. 15.

1. By defaming our characters. Matt. v. 11.
2. By embezzling our property. Phil. iii. 18.
3. By abusing our persons. Acts vii. 60.

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. Matt. xxvi. 41.

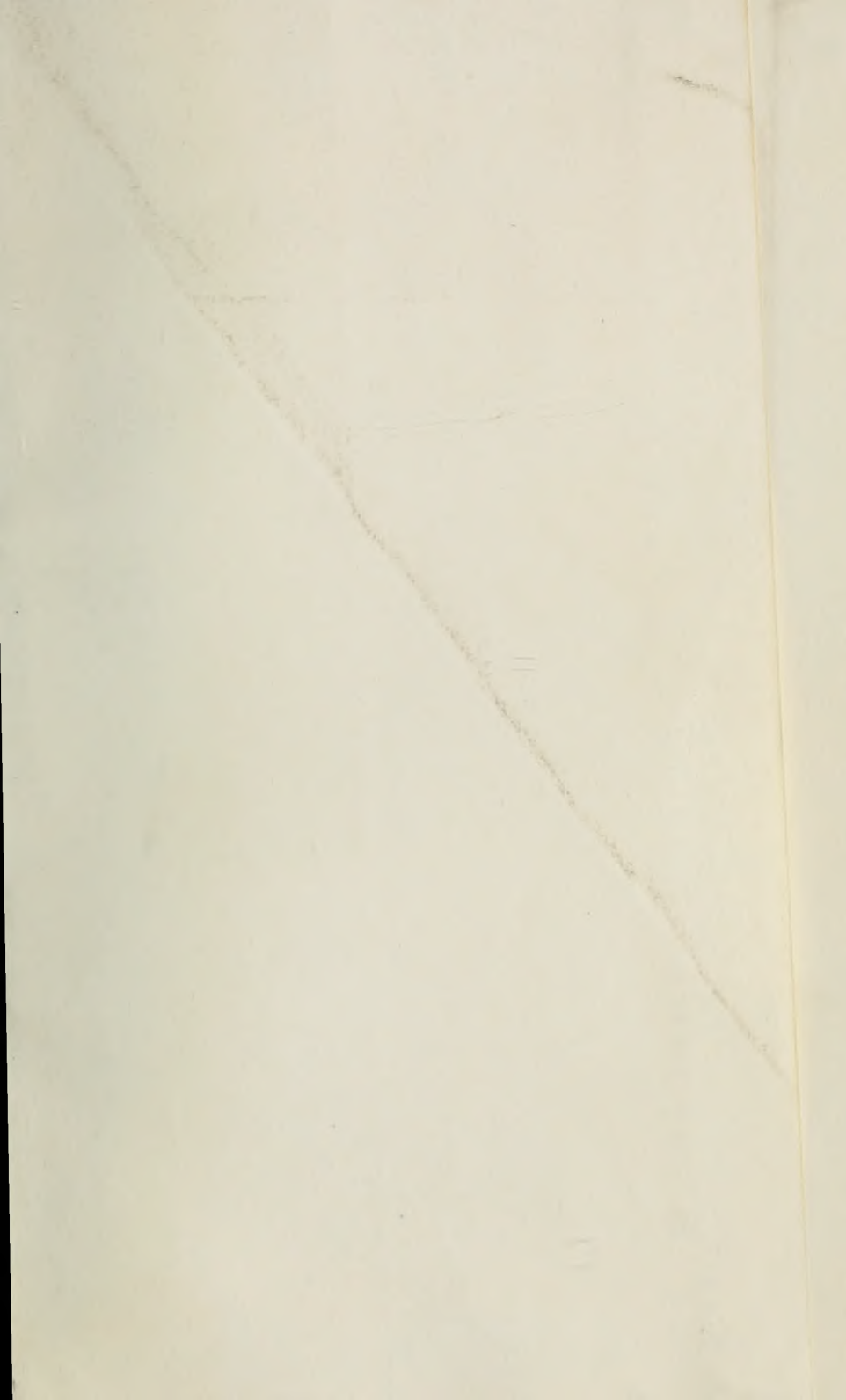
1. Of overwhelming afflictions. Ps. cxxx. 1.
2. Of worldly enticements. 1 John ii. 15.
3. Of Satan's devices. 1 Tim. iii. 7.
4. Of error's seduction. 1 Tim. vi. 10.
5. Of sinful affections. Rom. i. 26.

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER. Jude 25.

1. Thy kingdom governs all. Ps. ciii. 19.
2. Thy power subdues all. Phil. iii. 20, 21.
3. Thy glory is above all. Ps. cxlviii. 13.

AMEN. Eph. i. 11.

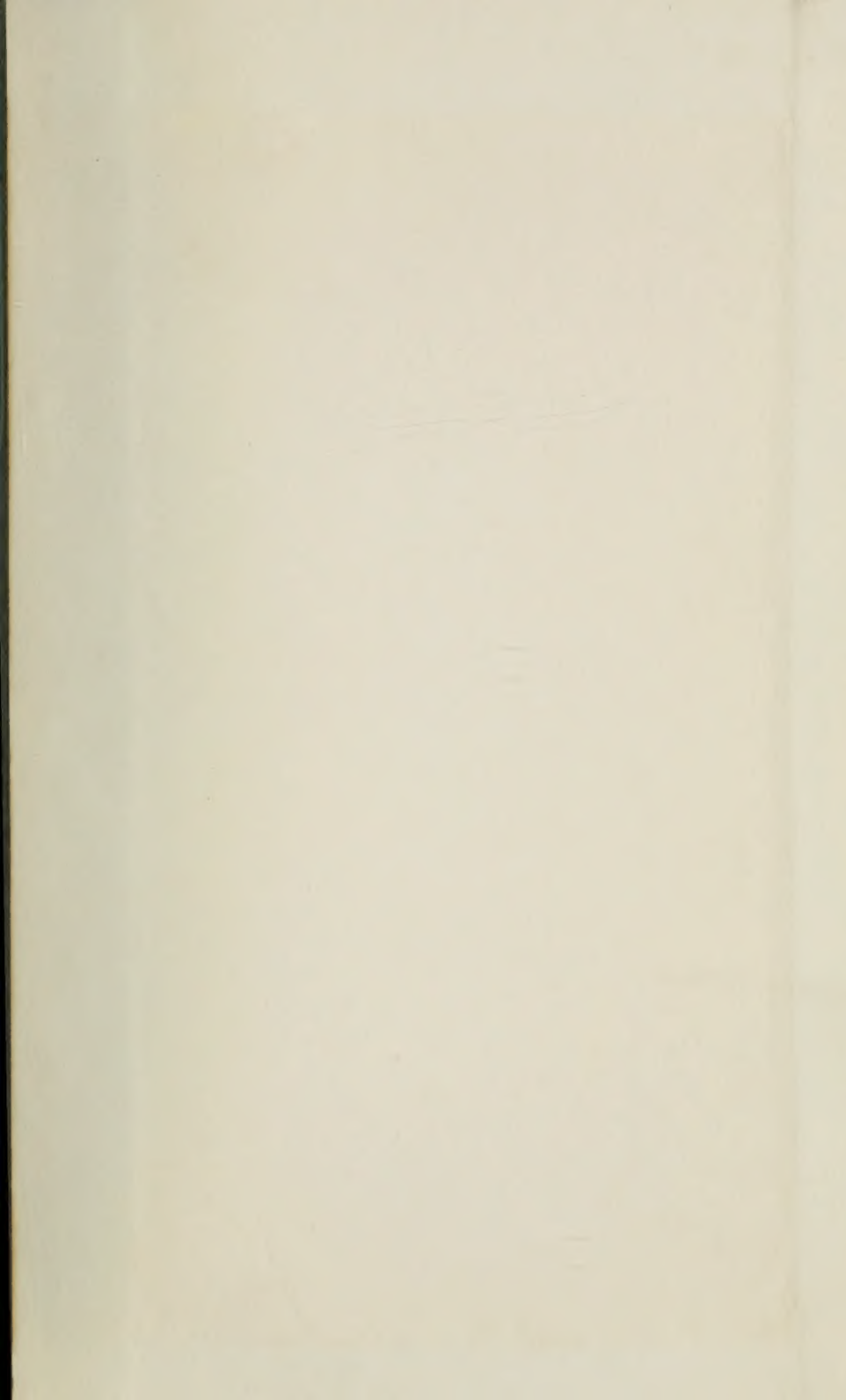
1. As it is in thy purposes. Isa. xiv. 27.
2. So it is in thy promises. 2 Cor. i. 20.
3. So be it in our prayers. Rev. xxii. 20.
4. So shall it be to thy praise. Rev. xix. 4.



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